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or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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The Vedic World View

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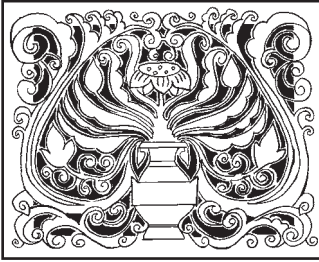
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Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
E-mail: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Jyoti: Light

September 2008

Vol. 113, No. 9

सूर्यो द्यां सूर्यः पृथिवीं सूर्य आपोऽति पश्यति ।
सूर्यो भूतस्यैकं चक्षुरा रुरोह दिवं महीम् ॥

The sun looks beyond the sky, beyond earth, beyond the waters. The sun, the one eye of what exists, has mounted the great sky.

(Atharva Veda, 13.1.45)

ध्रुवं ज्योतिर्निहितं दृश्ये कं मनो जविष्ठं पतयत्स्वन्तः ।
विश्वे देवाः समनसः सकेता एकं क्रतुमभि वि यन्ति साधु ॥

A steady light, swifter than thought, is stationed among moving things to show the way to happiness. All the gods, being of one mind and like wisdom, proceed reverentially towards the one Intelligence.

(Rig Veda, 6.9.5)

अयं रोचयदरुचो रुचानोऽयं वासयद् व्यृतेन पूर्वीः ।
अयमीयत ऋतयुग्भिरश्वैः स्वर्विदा नाभिना चर्षणिप्राः ॥

He, shining, caused to shine what shone not. By law he lighted up the dawns. He moves with steeds yoked by eternal Order, making people happy by the chariot-nave that finds the sunlight.

(6.39.4)

यज्जाग्रतो दूरमुदैति दैवं तदु सुप्तस्य तथैवेति ।
दूरङ्गमं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरेकं तन्मे मनः शिवसंकल्पमस्तु ॥

May that, my mind, capable of illumination—a light of all lights, which rides far when one is awake and returns to its place when one falls asleep—be moved by right intention.

(Yajur Veda, 34.1)

हिरण्मये परे कोशे विरजं ब्रह्म निष्कलम् ।
तच्छुभ्रं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिस्तद्यदात्मविदो विदुः ॥

In the supreme effulgent sheath of intelligence dwells Brahman, the infinite Being—stainless, transcendent, pure. Light of all lights, it is that whom the knowers of the Self realize. (Mundaka Upanishad, 2.2.9)

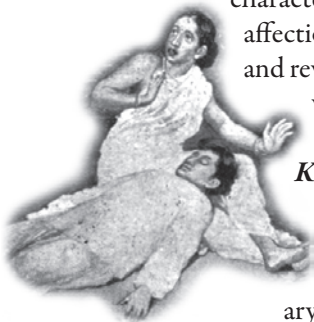
THIS MONTH

The world view of the Vedic seers was characterized by direct apprehension of the sacred in all aspects of nature and being, a positive, universal, and pluralistic outlook on life, and the ability to penetrate into deep spiritual truths. This number is dedicated to **The Vedic Vision**.

The dialogue between the Vedic rishi Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shwetaketu, as presented in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, is a quintessential statement of the Advaita Vedanta approach to Truth. It also provides an interesting glimpse into the sophisticated interpretative skills of the Vedic mind. Swami Alokandaji of the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi, provides us a synoptic view of this dialogue and its meaning for us in '*Tat-tvam-asi, Shwetaketu*'.

Yajnavalkya, a name to reckon with in ancient Indian literature, is the archetypal Vedic rishi—established in the knowledge of Brahman, adept at materializing transcendent truths in day-to-day activities, a formidable dialectician, and a respected teacher. Swami Ritanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, dwells on the personality of this Vedic sage in **The Story of Yajnavalkya**.

'Still on this sacred soil of India, this land of Sita and Savitri, among women may be found such character, such spirit of service, such affection, compassion, contentment, and reverence, as I could not find anywhere else in the world,' Swami Vivekananda once said. **The Kanyā Tejasvinī of Indian Culture** is a portrait of the heroic Savitri by Dr Prema Nandakumar, Researcher and Literary Critic, Srirangam.



The young Nachiketa has long been seen as the symbol of the ideal spiritual aspirant: full of dynamic faith, quiet self confidence, innate respect for the positive aspects of tradition, and burning aspiration; and possessing a spontaneous spirit of sacrifice and indomitable will. Swami Divyasukhanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, focuses on these aspects as he echoes Swami Vivekananda's wish: **May We All Be Nachiketas**.



In the second instalment of the **Narada Bhakti Sutra**, Swami Bhaskareswaranandaji, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses the characteristics of *para bhakti* and the features that mark a person who has attained to this state.

Yoga involves transformation of the psyche and the development of a fresh outlook on life. This calls for detachment and the conscious cultivation of mindfulness; the bottom line, of course, is practice. These are some of the insights provided by Swami Sarvagatanandaji, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, in **Light on Patanjali – II**.

In the second instalment of her article, **Vithoba of Pandharpur**, Dr Suruchi Pande, Researcher in Sanskrit, Jnanaprabodhini Institute, Pune, takes a look at the history and tradition of the Vithoba temple and the Varkari movement.

Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, reviews the script of *Rupa-Sanatan*, one of Girishchandra Ghosh's important dramas, to highlight **Ramakrishna's Influence on Girish's Plays**.



EDITORIAL

The Vedic Vision

Give sight to our eyes,
Give sight to our bodies that they may see.
May we survey and discern this world.
May we look on thee, Surya
the most lovely to behold;
See well with human eyes.

—Rig Veda, 10.158.4–5

THE Madhu Vidya of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* is a wonderful imagery of the sun in relation to the earth and its inhabitants: ‘Yonder sun is, verily, the honey of the gods. Heaven is the cross-beam [of the comb]; intermediate space, *antarikṣa*, the hive; and the rays are the offspring. The eastern rays of the sun are the eastern honey cells. The Rik verses are the bees; [the rituals laid down in] the Rig Veda is the flower; and the water [of sacrificial libations] is the nectar. These Riks heated the Rig Veda. From it, thus heated, issued forth—as its essence—fame, [physical] lustre, [vigour of] the senses, strength, and the food that is eaten.’

To the integral vision of the Vedic rishis, the cosmos is an organic unit, throbbing with life (*prāṇa*), consciousness or light (*jyoti*), and divinity (*deva-tā* or *deva-tva*); and Surya or the Sun is the archetypal symbol of this vision. Not only does the sun—the one light (of all), the giver of heat—sustain life through light and heat, it also powers the hydrological cycle: ‘These shining rays are surely water,’ declares a Vedic text.

But physical sustenance is only one of Surya’s many functions. The gods certainly do not eat or drink, *na vai devā aśnanti na pibanti*, they are sated by the nectar of sacrificial oblations, *etadevāmṛtaṁ dṛṣtvā tṛpyanti*. Yajna or sacrifice is a key element of the Vedic way of life: ‘*Satyam brhad ṛtam-ugram dikṣā tapo brahma yajñam prthivīm dhārayanti*;

great Truth, formidable Order, consecration, austerity, prayer, and sacrifice uphold the earth.’ The fire sacrifice or *agnihotra*, involving twice-a-day offerings of simple libations of milk or ghee in a consecrated fire, was an important component of Vedic life. Performance of larger sacrificial rituals—and this is one meaning of ‘the Riks heated the Rig Veda’ in the Madhu Vidya cited above—obviously brought glory and fame to the sacrificer.

But the physical ‘fire-sacrifice’ was only one of the many sacrificial elements in Vedic life. In fact, the rishis asserted that virtually every object in the universe could be conceived of as being in a reciprocal relationship of food (*anna*) and its eater (*annāda*) with other objects. For instance, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says: ‘The vital force (*prāṇa*) is verily food, and the body is the eater of food. The body rests on the *prāṇa* and the *prāṇa* rests on the body. Food rests on food.’ Thus, the web of existence is much more intricately interrelated than is evident from the biological food chain. And all activity is sacrificial in nature.

Virtually all our problems—from strained interpersonal relations to global warming—can be traced to our lack of recognition of this profound truth about the sacral and sacrificial nature of life and activity. Knowledge of this truth and willing participation in the cosmic sacrifice can engender profound changes in our personality: ‘*Atha martyo amṛto bhavati atra brahma samaśnute*; then a mortal becomes immortal and attains Brahman here (itself).’

Changing one’s total outlook on life may appear an impossible task. But the Vedas assure us that it is not. They also lead us through the steps necessary for this transformation, often in very unobtrusive ways. Attitudes are in the mind; so it is the

mind that needs to be worked upon. The process is termed *upāsana* or contemplation. The meditative practices prescribed in the Upanishads are also termed *vidyā*, knowledge; it is knowledge that shapes our attitudes.

‘*Adityo brahma iti ādeśaḥ*; the sun is Brahman, this is the instruction,’ says the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, as it calls upon us to break free of the limitations of our minds, expand our hearts, and realize the infinitude that is Brahman. We may imagine that we can mentally conceive of infinitude in spatial or temporal terms, but the Upanishads wish to achieve something more: they want us to grow into this infinitude. Hence they ask us to contemplate on the sun as a symbol (*pratika*) of Brahman.

The sun, to our eyes, is a limited entity. But it possesses a quality that is attributed to Brahman: light. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* continues, ‘In the beginning all this was indeed unmanifest (non-existent). That became manifest’; and Acharya Shankara clarifies: ‘It is seen that the word “*sat*, existent” is used with regard to things which have their names and forms manifest. Generally that manifestation of names and forms of the world is dependent on the sun, for in the absence of the sun it would become blinding darkness.’ The Upanishad reminds us that the creation of the sun is accompanied by a sound that continues to reverberate throughout its existence, much like the crescendo and decrescendo of mundane noises that follow the sun’s diurnal rising and setting. ‘He who having known this, meditates on the sun as Brahman, to him come quickly beautiful sounds, and give him delight.’ This yogic experience is an early indication of attainment of mental concentration and internal transformation. But there are deeper layers of reality that still remain to be uncovered.

The Vedas invite us to look beyond the veil of material objects and perceive the divinity underlying all Creation. The sun is not merely a symbol of Brahman, we are reminded: ‘Those who have closed their eyes (to external objects), who have attained concentration of mind, and who depend

on such spiritual disciplines as celibacy’ are able to witness ‘the golden person who is in the sun, who has a golden beard and hair, who is golden to the very tip of his nails’.

How does this vision help us? The Upanishad tells us that as ‘this being [in the sun] has risen above all evil; one who knows this also rises above all evil’. Moreover, the *vidyās* involve identification with reality of a higher and deeper order—note the phrase ‘with eyes closed’ above. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* announces: ‘The being who is in the solar orb and the being who is in the right eye rest on each other. The former rests on the latter through the rays, and the latter rests on the former through the function of the eyes.’ But the being in the sun is also ‘the lord of the worlds beyond the sun, and of all the wishes of the gods [inhabiting those worlds]’.

On identifying with such an entity one’s consciousness is bound to undergo a transformative expansion. Hence the Gayatri mantra—a ‘perfect blend of lofty aspiration and willed assertion’—is the one Vedic prayer that remains popular to this day: ‘May he (the Sun) inspire our thoughts that they become illumined visions of truth.’

With expansion of consciousness we realize that we are not mere limited beings, only capable of seeing, thinking, and imagining: ‘This being identified with the mind and resplendent by nature [is realized by the yogis] within the heart as [of the size of] a grain of rice or barley. He is the lord of all, the ruler of all, and governs all—whatever there is.’

The *Prashna Upanishad* points out to us the spiritual significance of the sun: ‘(The enlightened sages who have realized Brahman know) the one that is possessed of all forms, full of rays, endowed with illumination, the support of all, the one light (of all), the giver of heat. There rises the sun—the thousand-rayed, existing in a hundred forms, the life of all creatures.’ And the *Taittiriya Upanishad* reminds us of another profound truth: ‘He that is here in the human person, and He that is there in the sun, are one.’ It is up to us to realize and manifest these truths.

‘Tat-tvam-asi Shwetaketu’

Swami Alokananda

JUST as the system of natural numbers is based on the number ‘one’, there is a unifying principle underlying this amazingly diverse universe. In their search for the origin of the universe, physicists have managed to isolate the constituents of atomic nuclei, but they still have not been able to locate the ‘unity’ underpinning the physical world. Spiritual seekers, with their eyes turned inward (*āvṛttacakṣu san*), realized that unity and said, ‘*Sadeva somyedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam*; in the beginning, my dear, this was Being (*sat*) alone—one alone, without a second.’¹ In answer to the question, ‘Revered Sir, what is that by knowing which all this becomes known?’ the *Mundaka Upanishad* points to an absolute entity beyond the ken of the senses. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says: ‘*Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yat-prayantyabhisamviśanti, tad-vijijñāśasva, tad-brahmeti*; that from which these beings are born, that by which, when born, they live, that into which they go and merge [at the time of dissolution]—seek to know that, that is Brahman.’² The *Chhandogya Upanishad* announces the same principle: ‘*Sa ya eṣo’nimaitadātmyam-idam sarvaṁ tat-satyam sa ātmā tat-tvam-asi śvetaketu*; that which is this subtle essence, all this has got that as the Self, that is Truth, that is the Self, that you are, Shwetaketu.’³ The realization of this unity underlying diversity is the ultimate knowledge—the culmination and fulfilment of all knowledge.

The Vedas have employed a whole host of narratives to make this subtle truth intelligible. The commentator, Acharya Shankara, reiterates this: ‘*ākhyāyikā vidyā-stutyarthā*; the story is in praise of the science.’ The principle of unity is dealt with in detail in the dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and Shwetaketu, in the sixth chapter of the *Chhandogya*

Upanishad. Incidentally, in the fifth chapter of the same Upanishad, both Uddalaka Aruni and Shwetaketu approach King Pravahana Jaivali for instruction in the *pancāgni vidyā*, meditation on the five fires, which serves as a prelude to the ultimate knowledge of the Self.

On Knowing That, Everything Is Known

When Uddalaka, a Vedic rishi, found that his son Shwetaketu had not begun the study of the Vedas even at the age of twelve, the age for *upanayana* or initiation into Vedic studies, he sent him to the house of a teacher. When Shwetaketu returned home after having studied the Vedas for twelve years, the father was shocked to find him vain and immodest. Knowledge ought to make a person humble. Uddalaka said to his son, ‘Did you ask (your teacher) about that instruction through which the unheard of is heard, the unthought of is thought of, and the unknown becomes known?’ Shwetaketu was surprised. Could there ever be anything knowing which everything else is known? How could knowing about one object bring about knowledge of an unrelated entity? After all, we learn about objects by noting their distinctive identities.

Uddalaka explained: All transformation is change of name and form, *nāma* and *rūpa*, which are superimposed on an underlying substance. Having known a piece of clay one gets to know all objects made of clay, having known a piece of gold one gets to know all objects made of gold, and having known a piece of iron one gets to know all objects made of iron—for all modifications are mere words, having speech as their basis, the underlying substance (clay, gold, or iron) is the reality (6.1.4–6). The entire world of phenomena, being a series of transformations, is a conglomerate of forms with

corresponding names—the transformations are mere names; knowledge of the one, indivisible Existence underlying all phenomena gives us the knowledge of all that exists.

Shwetaketu understood that his learning was incomplete. He requested his father to give him the knowledge which he spoke about. Uddalaka was happy to find his son humbly seeking further knowledge. *Gurūpasadana*, approaching the guru formally, in all humility, was an essential prerequisite for studentship in ancient India. Even princes had to follow this procedure—they would go to the guru ‘faggots in hand, *samitpāṇi*’. Being satisfied with his son’s behaviour Uddalaka said: ‘In the beginning, my dear, this (universe) was Being (*sat*) alone, one only, without a second. ... It (Being, Brahman) cogitated, “I shall be many, I shall be born.” It created fire.’ From fire arose the waters, and from the waters food. Brahman entered these primeval entities to manifest name and form. On being consumed by the individual, the subtle aspects of food, water, and fire give rise to mind, vital force (*prāṇa*), and speech. Hence, ‘the mind consists of food, *prāṇa* of water, and speech of fire’ (6.6.5).

Food as Mind and Water as Prāṇa

Shwetaketu could not understand how food became the mind or water *prāṇa*. Uddalaka decided to explain the matter with a practical example. He asked Shwetaketu to avoid taking food for fifteen days and live only on water. Shwetaketu survived this test as the water he was taking ensured that *prāṇa* did not leave the body. But he could not recall the Vedic mantras that he had earlier committed to memory. Uddalaka explained: ‘Just as a single ember, the size of a firefly, remains as the residue of a big fire, and by that nothing bigger is burnt, even so, my dear, of your sixteen parts only one remains; with that you are unable to recall the Vedas. Eat, and then you will understand me.’ Shwetaketu started taking food again, and his memory was revived. He understood how the mind was made of food and the vital force of water. Next Uddalaka pointed out that pure Being underlies all phenomenal objects de-

rived from food, water, and fire. The body is born of food, and food of water; and water has fire (energy) as its source. Fire, or *tejas*, originates from Being, from Brahman. Thus ‘when a person departs hence, speech is withdrawn into the mind, mind into vital force, vital force into fire, and fire into the supreme Deity’ (6.8.6). The body of the dying person stops speaking, fails to respond to commands, becomes bereft of life, and turns cold in succession. The individual is then merged in Being, although this merger is only temporary, as in deep sleep. The phenomenal name and form are transitory and are hence termed unreal, *mithyā*. *Sat* or Being is ever-existent: ‘All creatures are rooted in Being, they dwell in Being, and (finally) merge in Being’ (ibid.).

Why Don’t We Know the Self?

As one moves between the different rooms in one’s house, one continues to have a memory of all the things found in these rooms. But though we become one with *sat* every night, in deep sleep, we fail to remember this fact on awakening. So, how can one assert that all beings are born of *sat* and dwell in *sat*? Uddalaka gives two illustrative examples to clarify this: ‘As bees, my dear, make honey by collecting the juices of trees located at different places, and reduce them to one form, and these juices have no such distinctive ideas as “I am the juice of this tree” or “I am the juice of that tree”’; or ‘these eastward rivers flow to the east and westward to the west; they arise from the sea and flow into the sea. Just as these rivers, while they are in the sea, do not know “I am this river” or “I am that river”’, even so ‘all these creatures having come from pure Being, do not realize that they have come from pure Being’ (6.9.1, 6.10.1–2).

A wave or a bubble arising out of the vast waters of the sea loses its individuality on merger with the sea; how is it then that the individual being, *jiva*, is not destroyed upon merger with pure Being at the time of death? Uddalaka takes up this issue next: ‘If one were to strike at the root of this big tree, it would bleed but live; if one were to strike in the middle, it would bleed but live; if one were to strike

at the top, it would bleed but live. Pervaded by the living self, the tree continues to live happily, drinking in its nourishment.

‘If the jiva leaves any one branch of this tree, that branch dries up. If it leaves a second branch, that one dries up too. If it leaves a third branch, even that dries up. When it leaves the whole, the whole tree withers.’ In exactly the same manner, ‘bereft of the living self, this body dies; the living self dies not. That which is this subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That thou art, *Shwetaketu*’ (6.11.1–3).

Not all doubts are gone yet; how can this gross world of name and form emerge from a very subtle unitary principle? Uddalaka is a good teacher. He comes down to the level of the student and provides illustrative examples that are easy to comprehend. He asks *Shwetaketu* to fetch a fruit from the banyan tree in front. When the fruit is fetched, he says, ‘Break it. What do you see inside?’ ‘These grains (seeds), exceedingly small,’ *Shwetaketu* answers. ‘Break one of them. What do you see there?’ the father continues. ‘Nothing,’ says *Shwetaketu*. ‘That subtle essence, my dear, which you do not perceive there—from that very essence this huge banyan tree arises. Believe me, my dear. That which is this subtle essence, all this has got that as the Self,’ summed up Uddalaka (6.12.1–3).

Why Don’t We Perceive the Self?

If the Atman is Existence itself and if it pervades all existent objects, how is it that we do not perceive it? An existent object must be perceivable. This doubt of *Shwetaketu*’s continues to echo in human minds even today. Let us look at the solution offered by Uddalaka: ‘Place this (lump of) salt in water and then come to me in the morning,’ he tells *Shwetaketu*. The son does as he is told. The next morning Uddalaka says to *Shwetaketu*, ‘Son, bring me the salt that you placed in the water last night.’ The salt, of course, has dissolved and cannot be found. Uddalaka next asks *Shwetaketu* to sip the water from one end, the middle, and the other end. It tasted salty every time. ‘The salt was there on each occasion,’ remarks *Shwetaketu*. ‘Even so, my

dear,’ Uddalaka adds, ‘you do not perceive Being in this body; but it is indeed there’ (6.13.1–2).

Sensory knowledge is mediate; it is therefore both limited and coloured by the nature of the senses. We cannot hope to perceive the entity that is beyond the reach of the senses with such instruments or with mere argumentation. But the insight born of discriminative thinking attended by faith, *śraddhā*, can help us realize this principle. Hence Uddalaka urged *Shwetaketu*: ‘*śraddhatsva somyeti*; have faith, my dear’ (6.12.2).

How Do We Realize the Self?

We gather from Uddalaka’s explanations that the knowledge of the Being that is the primal source of this world is the consummation of all knowledge and is the source of ultimate fulfilment. But how are we to attain the knowledge of this entity beyond the senses? Uddalaka introduces another interesting narrative to explicate the matter: Just as when a person from the remote country of Gandhara is brought (handcuffed and) blindfolded to a solitary place and left there, he keeps shouting piteously and searching for the way back, when a kind and knowledgeable person removes his ties and blindfolds and shows him the way to Gandhara, and thus instructed, the intelligent victim traverses a long distance to reach Gandhara, enquiring about the path of the villages on the way, in similar manner, when the jiva, blinded by ignorance and lost in the wilderness of the world, earnestly seeks deliverance, then some great teacher provides the person with the liberating knowledge: ‘*Tat-tvam-asi*; That thou art’. After hearing this instruction from the guru, the disciple undertakes reflection, *manana*, and meditation, *nididhyāsana*, to realize Brahman, the source of this universe. Having realized Brahman, the person becomes a *jivanmukta*, free while living. Such persons have no attachment to the body, which persists by virtue of *prārabdha*, the result of actions that have started bearing fruit. When *prārabdha* is exhausted, the person is freed of even the semblance of attachment to the body: ‘*Tasya tāvadeva ciram jāvanna vimokṣyetha sampatsye*; for him there is

delay only as long as he is not liberated [from the body], then he merges into Being' (6.14.2).

In this manner Uddalaka explained to Shwetaketu the nature of the ultimate Truth that, though invisible to the gross eye, is the substrate of the phenomenal world—its source, support, and ultimate end—knowing which everything else is known. And the crux of this remarkable teaching is that this entity called *sat* animates all existence as its inner Self, it is the Truth that resides in all beings as the Atman. We are this *sat* in our innermost being as much as Shwetaketu is. Having obtained this teaching, Shwetaketu attained to wholeness and fulfilment.

It might be questioned if this narrative from the *Chhandogya Upanishad* has the same relevance today as it had in days of yore. It certainly has. The Upanishadic truths are timeless. Self-knowledge is coveted by all people, at all time, and in all climes. The unifying knowledge that this represents is sought after even by physicists, though only on the material plane. For a total realization of this Being, complete destruction of the limiting ego is as essential as is *śraddhā*. Mere listening does not provide knowledge. It has to be acquired, and the Upanishads mention *śravaṇa* or hearing, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* as means for this acquisition. A whole series of doubts arose in Shwetaketu's mind.

This indicates that he had undertaken *manana*. And that he could master this knowledge shows that he had perfected *nididhyāsana* as well. Viewed from the psychological standpoint, *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* involve knowing acceptance of the counter-intuitive nature of the instructions of the guru, adjusting one's thought and behaviour to this newly acquired truth, and finally blending or merging one's being in the ultimate Truth or pure Being. Passing through this entire process is essential for the acquisition of knowledge.

Uddalaka is an ideal teacher. He patiently set about instructing his pupil in accordance with his mental make-up and inclination. The simple practical examples that he offers can be comprehended by virtually anyone. If we too purge ourselves of egotism and arrogance as Shwetaketu did, seek instructions from a competent guru in all humility and with a concentrated mind, and then reflect deeply and meditate intensely on the instructions received, we too shall attain to wholeness and fulfilment.



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Life as a Sacrifice

One of the grandest conceptions of life as a sacrifice is to be found in the *Chāndogya* (3.16–17), which, by the way, is the richest storehouse of Upaniṣadic meditation. This Upaniṣad says, 'Man himself is a sacrifice', and shows in detail how this can be so. Man's life, divided into three stages, is compared to the three periods in a sacrifice called *savanas*. Each period is given its proper deities. The first stage is presided over by the Vasus, who work for life's stability, for life requires the utmost attention during this period. They are succeeded in youth by the Rudras, the energetic gods, who are often cruel. Consequently, a man must be extremely judicious in what he does in his youth. Old age is presided over by the Ādityas, who attract everything towards them. Men, then attracted by higher forces, prepare for the final departure after making their best contribution to the world. In this connection, we are also asked to look on distress caused by hunger and thirst as *dikṣā* (initiation) into a higher life of struggle and achievement; on charity, non-killing, truth, etc. as *dakṣiṇā* (offerings to the performers of our sacrifice, i.e. to our good neighbours); on merriment and laughter as hymns and songs to gods; and on death as the bath after the sacrifice is completed.

There are many other practical hints for transforming life into a spiritual discipline. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (5.11) instructs us to look on death and disease as *tapasyā* (penance): 'This indeed is excellent austerity that a man suffers when he is ill. ... This indeed is excellent austerity that a man after death is carried to the forest. ... This indeed is excellent *tapasyā* that a man after death is placed on the fire.'

—The Cultural Heritage of India, 1.376



The Story of Yajnavalkya

Swami Ritananda

IT was in the Vedic Age that the seeds of all subsequent spiritual attainments in India were sown. Apart from the pastoral simplicity of the people, that age was marked by an integral view of reality and a holistic outlook on life. There was then hardly any distinction between the sacred and the secular, and all activities, including biological functions, were regarded as participation in cosmic sacrifice, yajna. Since life was a total consecration to the realization of the transcendent Reality, the contradiction between renunciation and involvement in life was not felt. The distinction between personal God and the impersonal Absolute, between bhakti and jnana, karma and yoga, and such other apparent dichotomies, which were to plague Indian spirituality in subsequent ages, had not been formulated. The world was not looked upon as illusory but as an expression of the luminous Spirit. All these features of Vedic life were embodied in the rishi ideal.

In this article we shall share a few glimpses of the extraordinary life of a Vedic rishi, whose very name fills our minds with awe and respect: Yajnavalkya, a great wonder, a myth personified. The

Puranas abound in references to Yajnavalkya, and for this reason many scholars uphold the theory that there were several Yajnavalkyas of repute. Here we shall try to portray, in a nutshell, Yajnavalkya's life and work in a unitary fashion, as we find it described in various textual sources.

The Man

Yajnavalkya was the incarnation of Brahma. Cursed by Shiva, Brahma incarnated himself as Yajnavalkya.¹ He was the son of Brahmapada, who was born of the limbs of Brahma.² The *Yajnavalkya Samhita*—a well-known book of religious law compiled by Yajnavalkya—mentions that Yājñavalkya's father's name was Yajñavalkya.³ Yajnavalkya learnt the yoga scriptures from Vasishtha, son of Hiranyanabha Kaushalya.⁴ He performed penance at Mithila.⁵ He learnt the science of the Self from Hiranyanabha, a king of the Raghu Dynasty and a teacher of yoga.⁶ The rituals pertaining to *dana* or charity, *shraddha* or post-funerary rites, and purification of ritual objects; duties of the householder, caste duties, duties of the ascetic, and the like, included in the *Garuda Purana*, were codified by Yajnavalkya.⁷ Ordered by

Mahadeva, Yajnavalkya composed the *Yoga Samhita* after observing penance in the hermitage of the great sage Upamanyu.⁸ Yajnavalkya used to attend the royal court of Yudhishtira and was the presiding priest at the Rajasuya sacrifice performed when Yudhishtira was crowned emperor.⁹

It is said that once, not being able to decide who among the brahmanas assembled at his horse sacrifice was the greatest, King Janaka hit upon a device. He set apart one thousand cows with a large quantity of gold tied to their horns and then said to them: 'I have dedicated all these things to the greatest among the brahmanas. He who is the greatest among you and the most profound scholar should accept all these.' None of the brahmanas present dared to accept the offer.

Then Yajnavalkya, who was also present on the occasion, said to his disciple: 'Dear Samashravas, please drive these cows home.' Samashravas complied. The other brahmanas were enraged. 'How dare he call himself the best Vedic scholar among us?' Ashwala, one of Janaka's priests, asked Yajnavalkya, 'Are you indeed the best Vedic scholar among us?' Yajnavalkya replied curtly, 'I bow to the best Vedic scholar. I just want the cows.' Ashwala and several other brahmanas then proceeded to interrogate Yajnavalkya with abstruse questions. Yajnavalkya defeated them all by providing deeply insightful answers to their queries and then leaving them dumbfounded with such queries as 'If someone pulls out a tree with its root, it no more sprouts. From what tree does a mortal (human being) spring forth after having been cut off by death?'¹⁰

Yajnavalkya was one of the disciples of Vaishampayana. Once Vaishampayana asked his disciples to perform the Brahmavadhya penance for him. Yajnavalkya offered to perform the penance all by himself. This boastful attitude annoyed Vaishampayana, and wishing to disown him, he said, 'Return everything that you have studied under me.' Obeying these words of his guru, Yajnavalkya returned the Yajur Veda 'by vomiting it out.' Other sages, disguising as *tittiras*, partridges, partook of the Yajur Veda. From that has grown the famous Taittiriya branch. In the

meanwhile, Yajnavalkya worshipped the Sun and gained access to a fresh set of Yajur Veda mantras which were unknown to others. The sun-god was gratified by Yajnavalkya's worship and assuming the form of a horse gave him the Yajur Vedic mantras that were in his possession. These Yajnavalkya divided into fifteen recensions known as Vajasanis. Fifteen of his disciples—Kanva, Madhyandina, and others—mastered these and became renowned as Vajis (fleet-footed, or of the horse lineage).¹¹ Later, Yajnavalkya compiled the Upanishads in accordance with the Vedas and explained them to King Janaka. He had a son from his senior wife Katyayani—she was also known as Kalyani—and his name was Katyayana. Yajnavalkya's other wife was Maitreyi.¹²

The Devotee

Yajnavalkya was a wonderful yogi and at the same time he had profound knowledge of the ultimate Reality—Brahman. He was also a great devotee. In the introduction to his book *Ramcharitmanas*, the poet saint Tulsidas, one of the biographers of Sri Ramachandra, acknowledged the fact that Yajnavalkya narrated the story of Ramachandra to sage Bharadvaja. Tulsidas wrote:

I am going to explain the message inherent in the beautiful story that sage Yajnavalkya narrated to the great sage Bharadvaja; let those who are righteous listen to that portrait with happy hearts.

Shambhu, the great deity, first composed this beautiful biographical story—*Ramacaritamansa*—and was kind enough to recite it to Parvati. Later he recited it to Kakabhushundi when he realized that Kakabhushundi was a devotee of Rama and was worthy.

Sage Yajnavalkya, in his turn, got it from Kakabhushundi; he sang it to sage Bharadvaja. These two, speaker and listener (Yajnavalkya and Bharadvaja), were both of them of equal intelligence and equally fair-minded and both of them were aware of the divine plays of Hari.

These omniscient sages had direct knowledge of everything belonging to the past, present and future as if it were an emblica [*sic*] in the palms of their hands. The other righteous devotees of

Hari (who knew of the divine plays and mysteries of God) listened to, recited, and explained this Character.¹³

The Yogi

Yajnavalkya composed a handbook on yoga philosophy, named *Yogi-yajnavalkya*, wherein he expounds the philosophy of yoga in reply to a query from his wife Gargi. Incidentally, Gargi is introduced by Yajnavalkya as his wife in this book, though in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* she is a rival questioner. The introductory narrative runs thus:

The great sage Yajnavalkya, the foremost of the sages, was omniscient. His knowledge of Reality had made his mind completely pure; he devoted himself to constant meditation on God after he had attained the requisite knowledge of all the branches of learning. He knew the essential philosophy of the Veda and Vedanta thoroughly; he was especially devoted to yogic practices. He had conquered his senses, the emotion of anger, the love of food, and his enemies, and thus had become the favourite of the brahmanas. He was always engaged in practising penance and meditating upon the Absolute. That handsome sage used to practise his everyday prayers and worship while staying in his hermitage. That great and noble sage, who had had the realization of Brahman, was always surrounded by brahmanas. He was calm, devoted to truth, spiritually attuned to all creatures, and an appreciator of everyone's merits. The only purpose of his life was to do good to others. One day when this great sage, who was endowed with such virtues, was discoursing upon the nature of the Divinity to the distinguished sages, the noble Maitreyi, who was the greatest of women, and Gargi the foremost of those who had had the realization of God, entered the august body of sages and offered their salutations by prostrating themselves. Then Gargi started addressing the great sage Yajnavalkya.

Gargi said: 'O Lord, you know the essence of all the branches of learning and are always engaged in work beneficial to all creatures. So I pray to you to duly explicate to me the philosophy of yoga with all its ancillaries.'

Yajnavalkya, being thus asked by his wife in the midst of the assemblage, glanced at all the sages

Vedic Collectivism

In collective life, assemblies play an important part, and the art of speaking is much in demand. Sages pray that they may 'speak loud' in the socio-religious assembly—Vidatha. The newly-married wife is told that she would address the Vidatha. Then there was the Sabha—the political council which required well-qualified people. In the Yajur Veda there is a prayer that the prince should have for his son a *sabheya yuva*, a youth capable of playing his part in the Sabha or political gathering. ... Elsewhere there is a prayer for the ideal son: 'To the man who offers to him, God Soma gives a heroic son—who is fit for work (*karmanya*), fit for home (*sadanya*), fit for the religious assembly (*vidathya*), fit for the political council (*sabheya*), and a source of glory to his father.'

Here is the ideal for the good citizen. A man must live beyond his individual sphere and contribute to collective life. Beyond the limited interests of the family and social group there was the wider interest of the state (*rashtra*), which was the concern of all enlightened people. Sages in the Yajur Veda declare: 'We shall awake in the state, placed in the front line; *vayam rashtre jagriyama purohitah*.'

—Words from the Vedas, xcvi–vii

and started speaking.

Bhagavan Yajnavalkya said: 'O Gargi, foremost among those who have realized Brahman, do please rise, God bless you. I am going to tell you the essence of that yoga which was explained by the Lord of Creation, Brahma, in ancient times. You should listen to what I say with a steadfast mind and complete attention. ...

'One day Brahma, the creator of the entire universe, was resting on his lotus-seat, and I approached him and worshipped him with salutations and hymns. I asked him the very things that you are asking: "O Lord, O Master of the universe, unfold to me that great occult knowledge, with due solemnity, of the work which will lead me to everlasting liberation." After I had said thus, Brahma, who is the Lord of Creation and the creator of his own self, was pleased to look at

me and started discoursing on the philosophy of knowledge and the philosophy of action.¹⁴

The Preceptor of Jnana

Since time immemorial a particular type of Indian mind has been very keen on discriminative dialectics. Perfection of this system resulted in the evolution of an independent system of yoga called jnana yoga. Doubts give rise to questions, questions goad one to enquiry, enquiry involves argumentation, and it is through argumentation and debate that the validity of a theory is established. Thus, argumentation and dialogue constitute the driving force behind the establishment of the truth of any theory. A truth is termed eternal only when it has been tested by ardent aspirants as well as critics and agnostics.

For this reason we find that in India, many a time, the highest truths have been brought to light in the scriptures in the form of dialogue. Generally, such dialogues involve the preceptor, the one who knows the Truth, and the disciple who aspires after knowledge. In the Upanishads, the realization of the Self, or the Atman, and the experience of the identity of Atman and Brahman are described as the ultimate human goals. The means of achieving these goals has been stated thus: *Atma va are drash-tavyah shrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyo*; the Self should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon.¹⁵ The Vedantic sadhanas are: *shravana*, *manana*, *nididhyasana*—hearing, reflection, and meditation. The Truth is to be heard of from the guru and the Shastras, to be reflected on, and meditated upon. *Manana*, or reflection, is the process in which this argumentation and dialogue come in.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* there is an enlightening dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi, in which profound truths are discussed. The Shastras in India enjoin that every man should give up the world when he becomes old. Yajnavalkya, having decided to renounce the householder's life for the hermit's, willed to divide his worldly possessions between his two wives.

Katyayani was satisfied with her share, but Maitreyi asked her husband to confer the knowledge which would make her immortal. Yajnavalkya said to his wife, 'My beloved, here is all my money and my possessions, I am going away.' She replied, 'Sir, if I had this whole earth full of wealth, would that give me immortality?' Yajnavalkya said, 'No, it will not. You will be rich, and that will be all; but there is no hope of immortality through wealth.' Maitreyi continued, 'What should I do to gain that through which I shall become immortal? Tell me that.' Yajnavalkya was pleased. He said, 'You have always been my beloved; you are more dear now because of this question. Come, take your seat, and I will tell you; and when you have heard, meditate upon it' (2.4.1–4).

With a view to teaching renunciation as a means to immortality, Yajnavalkya seeks to awaken detachment for worldly relations, wealth, and other attachments. He drives home the truth about the Self:

Not for the sake of husband, is the husband dear, but for one's own sake he is dear; not for the sake of wife, is the wife dear, but for one's own sake she is dear; not for the sake of sons, are sons dear, but for one's own sake they are dear; not for the sake of wealth, is wealth dear, but for one's own sake it is dear; not for the sake of the brahmana, is the brahmana dear, but for one's own sake the brahmana is dear; not for the sake of the kshatriya, is the kshatriya dear, but for one's own sake the kshatriya is dear; not for the sake of the worlds, are the worlds dear, but for one's own sake the worlds are dear; not for the sake of the gods, are the gods dear, but for one's own sake the gods are dear; not for the sake of the beings, are the beings dear, but for one's own sake the beings are dear; not for the sake of all, all is dear, but for one's own sake all is dear. Therefore, the Self should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon (2.4.5).

By the realization of the Self, through hearing, reflection, and meditation all this is known. Only thus is it realized. When these three means are combined, only then is true realization of the unity of Brahman accomplished, not otherwise. The word

'all' emphasizes that the Self alone is dear, and nothing else.

What do we get then? Before us we find a curious philosophy. The statement has been made that every love is selfishness in the lowest sense of the word: because I love myself, therefore I love another; it cannot be. There have been philosophers in modern times who have said that self is the only motive power in the world. That is true, and yet it is wrong. But this self is but the shadow of the real Self which is behind. It appears wrong and evil because it is small. That infinite love for the Self, which is the universe, appears to be evil, appears to be small, because it appears through a small part. Even when the wife loves the husband, whether she knows it or not, she loves the husband for that Self. It is selfishness as it is manifested in the world, but that selfishness is really but a small part of the Self-ness. Whenever one loves, one has to love in and through the Self. This Self has to be known. What is the difference? Those that love the Self without knowing what It is, their love is selfishness. Those that love, knowing what that Self is, their love is free; they are sages.¹⁶

Yajnavalkya continues: 'Whoever knows the brahmana as other than the Self, the brahmana deserts that being.' Similarly, the kshatriya, the worlds, the deities, the beings, and the universe desert the one who considers them as being other than the Self. Therefore, 'the brahmana, the kshatriya, the worlds, the gods, the beings, and all this are none but the Self, indeed.'¹⁷

Everything is the Self because everything springs from the Self, is resolved into it, and remains imbued with it during the span of its manifestation, for nothing can be perceived apart from the Self. The Self, being pure Intelligence, makes everything intelligible.

Every time we particularize an object, we differentiate it from the Self. As soon as we get attached to anything in the universe, detaching it from the universe as a whole, from the Atman, there comes a reaction. With everything that we love as being 'outside the Self', grief and misery ensues. If we enjoyed everything in the Self, and as the Self, there

would be no misery or reaction. This is perfect bliss. How does one apprehend this ideal? In an infinite universe, how does one take every particular object and look upon it as the Atman, without knowing the Atman?

Yajnavalkya addresses this doubt next: When a drum or a conch or a vina resounds, the particular notes or sounds cannot be distinguished from the wholeness of the great sound, for the individual notes are nothing but indistinguishable components of the overall music. Similarly, all particulars perceived in the waking and dream states are underpinned by the Intelligence or Consciousness which is the very nature of the Atman. So waking and dream states do not exclude the omnipresent Atman; rather, these two states merge into the all-pervading Atman.

Again, just as different streams of smokes as well as sparks and flames issue forth from a fire kindled with wet faggots, in the same way the Vedas, Upanishads, history, mythology, arts, philosophical aphorisms, and their explanations—all emerge from Brahman, much like breath issuing from the nostrils (2.4.7-10).

Therefore, it may be understood that the universe, at the time of its origin, as also prior to it, is nothing but Brahman. Moreover, it is not only at the time of its origin and continuance that the universe, on account of its non-existence apart from pure Intelligence, is Brahman, but it is so at the time of dissolution as well. Just as the bubbles of foam have no existence apart from the water from which they are generated, even so name, form, and activity, which are derived from pure Intelligence and again merge in it, are non-existent apart from this Intelligence or Brahman. Yajnavalkya illustrates this fact:

As the sea is the one goal of all waters, the skin of all touch, the nostrils of all smell, the tongue of all tastes, the eye of all forms, the ear of all sound; the mind of all deliberations, and the intellect of all knowledge; as the hands are the one goal of all work, the organ of generation of all enjoyment, the anus of all excretory function, the feet of all locomotion,

and the organ of speech of all the Vedas; as a lump of salt dropped into water dissolves in it and cannot be picked up in its original form, though its salinity is found everywhere in the water, even so the great endless infinite Reality is but pure Intelligence. The self emerges as a separate entity on the conglomeration of the elements, and is destroyed with them. On being merged into pure Intelligence, it goes beyond the bondage of the name and form that is its individuality (2.4.11–12).

The similes tell us that existence of objects as entities distinct from the Reality is a delusion engendered by contact with the limiting adjuncts of the body and the senses. These objects will ultimately enter their cause, the great Reality, the supreme Self—signified by the sea—which is undecaying, immortal, beyond fear, pure, and homogeneous, and which is pure Intelligence: infinite, boundless, without a break, and devoid of the differences caused by the delusion born of ignorance. When that separate existence merges in its cause, when the differences created by ignorance are gone, the universe becomes one without a second, ‘the great Reality’.¹⁸

Swami Vivekananda remarks:

We get the idea that we have all come just like sparks from Him, and when we know Him, we go back and become one with Him again. We are the Universal.

Maitreyi became frightened, just as everywhere people become frightened. Said she, ‘Sir, here is exactly where you have thrown a delusion over me. You have frightened me by saying there will be no more gods; all individuality will be lost. There will be no one to recognise, no one to love, no one to hate. What will become of us?’¹⁹

Yajnavalkya clarifies: ‘Maitreyi, I do not mean to puzzle you. When there is duality, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, and one knows something. But when to a knower of the Self everything becomes the Self, then through what—and what object—does one smell or see or hear or speak or think or know? How is it possible to know the knower?’²⁰

We know all things through the Atman. The Atman can never be the object of knowledge, nor can the knower be known; because it is in and through the Atman that we know everything.

So far the idea is that it is all One Infinite Being. That is the real individuality, when there is no more division, and no more parts; these little ideas are very low, illusive. But yet in and through every spark of the individuality is shining that Infinite. Everything is a manifestation of the Atman. How to reach that? First you make the statement, just as Yajnavalkya himself tells us: ‘The Atman is first to be heard of.’ So he stated the case; then he argued it out, and the last demonstration was how to know That, through which all knowledge is possible. Then, last, it is to be meditated upon. He takes the contrast, the microcosm and the macrocosm, and shows how they are rolling on in particular lines, and how it is all beautiful. ... All that is bliss, even in the lowest sense, is but the reflection of Him. All that is good is His reflection, and when that reflection is a shadow, it is called evil. ...

That one sweetness is manifesting itself in various ways. ... There is no sweetness but He. ... These ideas are very helpful to men; they are for meditation. For instance, meditate on the earth; think of the earth and at the same time know that we have *That* which is in the earth, that both are the same. Identify the body with the earth, and identify the soul with the Soul behind. Identify the air with the soul that is in the air and that is in me. They are all one, manifested in different forms. To realise this unity is the end and aim of all meditation, and this is what Yajnavalkya was trying to explain to Maitreyi.²¹

Conclusion

We have seen that Yajnavalkya, a householder, was an ardent yogi, an unflinching devotee and an incomparable jnani. He stands as a paragon of the rishi ideal of the Vedic Age. In modern times it is Sri Ramakrishna who has revived this rishi ideal:

Though modern life with its enormous complexity and sophistication may appear to be far removed from the pastoral simplicity of the Vedic Age, so-

biological studies reveal that the general trend of present-day attitudes, concepts, and social orientations is towards homogeneity and integrality. Science, as a search for truth, has acquired the sanctity of religion, the discovery of the unity of matter and energy has reduced the differences between the sacred and the secular and, while monks now feel compelled to get involved in social life, lay people are gaining greater awareness of the need for detachment, restraint, and contemplation. The modern man is in search of a holistic view of reality and an integral way of living. The ancient Vedic ideal of the *ṛṣi*, if adapted to the conditions of modern life, can meet the present need for a composite ideal. This was what Sri Ramakrishna did through his life.

His life was closer to that of the Vedic *ṛṣi* than that of the other Avatars of Hinduism, full of heroic exploits. His teaching of the harmony of religions is essentially a Vedic concept revitalized to suit modern conditions. The Vedic sages considered the cosmos to be in a state of flux; Sri Ramakrishna regarded it as the *līlā* of the Divine Mother. Through his doctrine of *vijñāna*, Sri Ramakrishna has recaptured the integral vision of the Vedic seers who saw divinity shining through every object in the universe.²²

Sri Ramakrishna's consort, the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, too lived an intense spiritual life in the midst of the din and bustle of household life, in order to restore the spirit of the rishi ideal in this age. Her spirit of detachment was remarkable. Once a rich merchant named Lakshminarayan requested Sri Ramakrishna to accept a sum of rupees ten thousand for his personal use. Sri Ramakrishna, of course, would not accept any money. So he asked the Holy Mother if she would accept the same. On hearing this suggestion, Sri Sarada Devi immediately replied: 'How can that be? The money can't be accepted. If I receive it, it will be as good as you receiving it; for if I take it, I shall spend it on you; and hence it will amount to your own acceptance. People respect you for your renunciation; therefore the money can never be accepted.'

Sister Nivedita observed:

In her [Sri Sarada Devi], one sees realized that

wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation.²³

Swami Vivekananda believed that 'without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. ... Mother [Sri Sarada Devi] has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world.'²⁴



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The Kanyā Tejasvinī of Indian Culture

Dr Prema Nandakumar

IN his letter dated 8 March 1899 to Romesh Chunder Dutt, Alfred Wallace discusses the Mahabharata, and writes: ‘The story of Savitri is the gem of the whole poem, and I cannot recall anything in poetry more beautiful, or any higher teaching as to the sanctity of love and marriage. We have really not advanced one step beyond these old-world people in our ethical standards.’¹

Romesh Chunder Dutt himself included Savitri’s tale in his verse rendering of Vyasa’s epic. When Vyasa wrote the ‘Pativrata Upakhyana’ for the Mahabharata it was already a well-known legend. Rishi Markandeya recounts the ‘ancient’ story to Yudhishtira, his brothers, and Draupadi when they are in the forest. Hence there must have been some earlier versions too. After Vyasa, the tale of Savitri and Satyavan has been retold in numerous ways. What is most astonishing is that while latter-day writers have taken infinite liberties with the characters of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, they have presented Savitri as the same perfect personality whom Vyasa has hailed as *kanyā tejasvinī*, the heroic virgin. Be it a folk narrative or an epic structure, Savitri comes through as a luminescent power, the young princess who won back her husband’s life from Yama by her sheer goodness and tapasya.

Sri Aurobindo writes in the ‘Author’s Note’ to his *Savitri* that the tale is one of the symbolic myths found in the Vedic cycle:

The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun,

goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Ashwapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch, and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.²

By the time we come to Vyasa, we have left behind the Upanishadic Age as well. The legend as recounted in the Itihasa is well known. Rishi Markandeya goes to meet Yudhishtira and his brothers in the forest. They welcome him, speak to him of the indignities suffered by their queen, and ask whether he has ever seen a *pativrata*—a virtuous wife—as wonderful as Draupadi. Immediately, the rishi tells them of Savitri. The tale spans seven cantos of the ‘Vana Parva’ in the Mahabharata.

Pativrata Savitri

Ashwapati, the king of the Madra country, is pious, virtuous, and a protector of his people. He has only one sorrow—no child has been born to him to continue his line. Therefore he performs tapasya for eighteen years and prays to goddess Savitri for the boon of a child. The goddess appears and grants his wish: ‘You will soon have a radiantly beautiful daughter, *kanyā tejasvinī*.’ When the girl child is born, Ashwapati names her Savitri. She grows up to be a divine damsel. Since she is very brilliant, no

suitors dares to ask for her hand.

One day she approaches Ashwapati with the prasada of her puja, and he, feeling that the time has come for her to find a bridegroom, asks her—who looks like Goddess Lakshmi, *śrīriva rūpiṇī*—to go and choose her husband: ‘Tell me then of him whom you would choose and after giving due consideration to it, I shall make the marriage proposal; choose him whom you will acceptably desire.’³

According to Sri Aurobindo, the words must have sounded like a mantra to Savitri:

As when the Mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And, musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
Are seized unalterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change.⁴

Savitri goes out on her quest. When she returns home after some time, she finds Rishi Narada conversing with her parents. Asked by the king, she says that she has chosen Satyavan, the son of the exiled and blind king Dyumatsena of Shalwa. Narada exclaims that the choice is a mistake, though Satyavan is a fine young man. Asked to explain himself, the sage says that Satyavan has only one more year to live. Ashwapati asks Savitri to reconsider her choice, but she is firm: ‘May he be of a short life or a long life, with virtuous qualities or else without them; I have chosen him as my husband and I shall choose not again. By perception does one first come to a certain conclusion, and then one holds it by speech; only afterwards is it put into action. That perception of mine for me is the one single authority here.’⁵

Finding her unyielding, Narada tells Ashwapati to go ahead with the marriage and suggests that all would be well. Ashwapati obtains Dyumatsena's permission, and the marriage is celebrated. After

Ashwapati and his entourage return to Madra, Savitri settles down to the simple and hard life of the forest. Placing aside her ornaments and rich garments, she looks after her parents-in-law and husband with great devotion and care. Thus she wins the love and respect of her family and others who are living in the hermitage.

Three days prior to the dire end foretold by Narada, Savitri performs the difficult *tri-rātra vrata*, the penance of three nights. She fasts for three days, at the end of which she offers oblations to the fire, salutes the elders of the hermitage, and obtains their blessings. According to Vyasa she is now *dhyāna-yoga-parāyaṇā*, one who has entered the yoga of meditation. On the fated day she accompanies Satyavan to collect firewood from the forest. When he falls down in a swoon, she finds a god-like person near her. She salutes him and wants to know who he is. Her reaction is just what it should be. Even in that dire moment, she stands up with folded hands, *kṛtānjali*, salutes the stranger, and says: ‘I take you to be some noble god as you have a form other than the human; if it pleases you, pray tell me who you are and what you propose to do, O god!’

Yama compliments her as one who is devoted to her husband and is full of tapasya—*pativratāṣi sāvitrī tathāiva ca tapo'nvitā*—and tells her that he has come to take the life of Satyavan away. He instructs her to return to her people. But Savitri has performed her *vrata* well: she is able to follow him. She tells Yama that she considers him a friend because they have walked seven steps together and utters the first of her righteous statements, *dharma-vacanas*.

The *dharma-vacanas* make a compendium for faultless living: One must have self-discipline to achieve anything worthwhile. Those who do not have self-possession cannot follow dharma. Following one's dharma is the only excellent way of life. *Sat-sanga*, company of the righteous, is most important for achieving a blameless life. One must not have malice towards anyone nor hurt anyone in thought or deed. One must always give in charity. One should be kind even to an enemy. Men put their trust in sages more than in themselves, for

sages never fail to help. Sages do not have ill will or selfishness and never regret the good they have done. Hence sages are the protectors of the world.

At the conclusion of each *dharma-vacana*, Yama expresses his joy—‘You speak as a reasonable person; your words are like water to a thirsty man,’ and so on—and grants her boons. He is delighted when she says finally that the sages protect the world. He says: ‘O devoted and chaste lady, the more in well-adorned verses, full of great significance and agreeable to perception, you speak of the noble things conformable to the dharma, the more does my excellent devotion for you increase; therefore, choose yet another but appropriate boon from me.’

Savitri takes the cue and asks for the life of Satyavan. Yama grants Satyavan’s life and blesses them both with long life and happiness. The way in which Savitri gently guides Satyavan back to the hermitage is described beautifully by Vyasa. Rishi Markandeya concludes his recital with a blessing: ‘That is how Savitri had saved and upraised herself, her father and mother, her father-in-law and mother-in-law, and extricated the whole house of her husband from calamity. The fortune-bringer Draupadi, full of noble qualities, will also, like Savitri, high-born and chaste, carry you all across to the further shore.’

The Enduring Savitri

The Puranic literature which came after the Upanishadic Age continued to retell the legend of Savitri. For instance, the *Padma Purana* (chapters 208–14) follows Vyasa in the main, with some delightful changes. Manu asks Bhagavan Matsya about great *pativrātās*, and the Lord speaks of Savitri: ‘In olden days, Ashwapati of the Sakala race ruled over Madra Desha. He had no sons. On the advice of good brahmanas, he began worshipping Goddess Savitri. He offered white lotuses in his homa, in the company of thousands of brahmanas. After ten months, on a *caturthi* day, the goddess appeared before Ashwapati.’⁶

Savitri is born to Queen Malati and grows up into a charming girl. At the appropriate time, Ashwapati arranges her marriage with Satyavan—

despite Narada’s prophecy. When the year comes to a close, Savitri undertakes the *tri-rātra* vow. Savitri and Satyavan go into the forest on the fatal day. A canto of thirty-five verses is devoted to the wanderings of Savitri and Satyavan in the forest, watching the glories of nature. Satyavan points to the mango tree, the *asoka*, and the *kimśuka*, which are in full blossom. He waxes eloquent, speaking about the creepers that were closing in on the footpath, the sound of bees—like Cupid readying his bow and arrow ‘to strike at couples like us’—and how ‘the forest is beautiful like you; *vibhāti cārutilake tvāmivaiṣā vanasthali*’. He also tells her of the loving couples around—the koels, bees, crows, lions, tigers, deer, elephants, *cakravākas*—quite a list!

Satyavan then says that he has collected fruits, and she, flowers—but what about wood, *indhana*? So she should now sit on the bank of a tarn while he cuts down a tree. She assents but asks him to be within her sight. After a little while, Satyavan tells her that he has a terrible headache and feels as if he is entering a dense darkness. He places his head on her lap and goes to sleep. Yama now appears and takes away the ‘thumb-sized’ life of Satyavan. Savitri follows him and speaks sweetly: ‘By the worship of mother this world is gained, by worshipping father the middle world, and by worshipping one’s teacher Brahmaloka is gained. ... He who serves all these three has followed all dharmas. He who does not, loses the fruit of his good deeds. As long as these three are alive, there is no need to do any other good deed. One must serve them to please them and make them comfortable.’

Vyasa’s *upākhyāna* is followed diligently from now on, and Yama gives back Satyavan’s life happily, for Savitri is the very image of dharma. He blesses them that they would live together happily for five hundred years.

While the Puranas recorded the story of Savitri in noble Sanskrit, the legend continued to be a favourite with the common populace. Savitri praises family life in her conversation with Yama, and lives as an ideal wife and daughter-in-law. Thus her story underlines the importance of the family unit for

the sustenance of dharma in Indian society. Indian women continue to perform an annual *vrata* to remind themselves of the power of Savitri. Among traditional recitations inspired by the ideal of family life and sung on the occasion of Savitri *vrata* is *Savitri Padam*, in simple colloquial Tamil. It was first published in book form seventy years ago by Sister Subbulakshmi, the renowned social worker of Madras, though it was composed perhaps a couple of centuries earlier. Subbulakshmi had been widowed as a child, and her life's work lay in serving widowed and abandoned girls, and yet she believed in this story. For she realized that what is important about the legend is the soul-strength it imparts. She says: 'May everyone recite this powerful work and gain the grace of the Divine Mother.'

The Savitri story in this poem gives one the impression that Ashwapati's was an ordinary middle-class home where women spend much of their time in the kitchen, clean the altar, decorate it with flowers and *kolam* (drawings with rice and lime powder), and spread offerings of cooked food like jaggery cakes, sesamum *laddus*, and *modakams*. There is a child-like innocence and unswerving faith in this tradition which comes through pleasantly as one listens to the recital.

Though *Savitri Padam* follows Vyasa closely, the descriptions are all home-made. The oral narrative is practical in its approach, since everyday life for the commoner provides little leisure for following the way of contemplation. The anonymous author takes great pleasure in detailing the rituals of Savitri's wedding, which opens with the breaking of three hundred coconuts in offering to Ganesha. The guardian thread is tied to Savitri's hand:

The parrot child was bathed in turmeric water
And decorated: a *sindur* on her broad forehead;
The tresses plaited with hanging pendant for the end;
The slim-waisted Savitri was rubbed with rose-
water from the bottle, and cool sandal-paste.

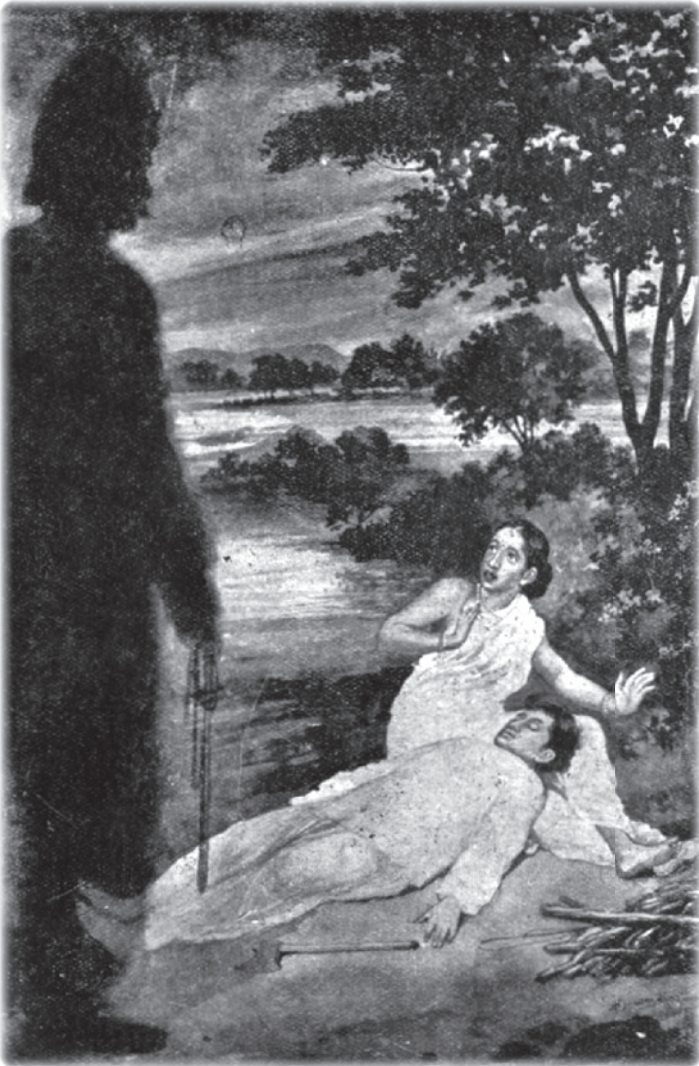
While Satyavan puts on the dress of a pilgrim for 'pilgrimage to Kashi' (a secular ritual in brahmana marriages), Ashwapati offers his daughter's hand and presently the bride and groom rock gently in

Yama, the god of Death · In the Rig Veda he [Yama] seems to have been originally a form of the Sun—even as late as the Isha Upanishad we find the name used as an appellation of the Sun—and then one of the twin children of the wide-shining Lord of Truth. He is the guardian of dharma, the law of the Truth, *satyadharma*, which is the condition of immortality, and therefore himself the guardian of immortality. His world is Swar, the world of immortality, *amrite loke akshite*. ... Yama and the ancient Fathers have discovered the path to that world which is a pasture of the Cows whence the enemy cannot bear away the radiant herds.
—Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, 221

the swing. Ashwapati then washes Satyavan's feet. Savitri is helped to wear the wedding sari in the traditional way. Satyavan ties the sacred thread around her neck and performs *homa*. It is a four-day wedding complete with grand feasts.

While in the forest, a few days prior to the foretold event, Savitri performs *gauri vrata*, remaining silent for three days while meditating on Parvati. When Satyavan swoons in the forest and Yama appears, Savitri speaks lofty thoughts. There is no trace of fear in her words, nor is Yama described in terms of terror. We recognize the presence of two great souls. This encounter, conveyed in simple, faith-laden words, must have given the countless men and women who have listened to the passage the strength of mind to cast off the fear of death. This is one of the innumerable instances through the centuries in which traditional tales become sublime tools of education. Sister Subbulakshmi was well aware of this angle and wrote in the introduction to her Tamil translation of the Bhagavadgita:

Our Puranas have a two-fold significance: the internal and the external; this double approach makes them accessible to all people—people who are in different states of consciousness. If the high truths of Hindu religion were written openly, many people would miss the deep ideas imbedded therein. But when an idea is presented as a story, first it is read and enjoyed, and as one's mind slowly matures, one begins to seek the truth of the tale.



Confronting Yama

The Tale Retold Yet Again

In more recent times, we have Sri Aurobindo's magnificent recreation of the Savitri legend as an epic in English. The great yogi had been educated in England, but when he returned to India in 1893 to teach at the Maharajah's College at Baroda, he was drawn to Indian tradition in a big way. He realized that just when the English-educated Indians had been hypnotized by Britain's ways and had begun to ape the West, a spiritual luminary appeared and Indian heritage was saved for all time:

British rule, Britain's civilising mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will and its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist

desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis [Swami Vivekananda] laid His finger on India's eyes and cried, 'Awake'. Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realised itself and the dead soul lived again.⁷

Sri Aurobindo now began writing extensively on Indian culture—translating from Indian classics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and composing narrative poems on the Indian legends of Ruru and Pramadvira, Urvashi, and Baji Prabhu, a lieutenant of Chhatrapati Shivaji. His narrative poems on Ulupi, Nala, and Chitrangada were left unfinished as he was imprisoned for taking part in the Indian independence movement. Among many of his services for projecting India's Sanatana Dharma to the elite through his peerless English style is the epic Savitri.

Sri Aurobindo began work on the epic when he was a professor in Baroda, but the work was stalled on his arrest for his activities in the Indian independence movement. After he settled down in Pondicherry in 1910, he returned to the work, expanding Vyasa's original legend into a human document containing twenty-four thousand lines of crystalline blank verse.

Sri Aurobindo admired Savitri as a heroine who did not take recourse to tears even when faced with the grim challenge of Death. He has transformed Vyasa's story in the light of his own philosophy of evolution and has instituted three major changes while handling Vyasa's tale. The first major change deals with the tapasya of eighteen years undertaken by Ashwapati for getting a daughter. Sri Aurobindo has developed it as Ashwapati's *dhyana yoga* or yoga of meditation, which takes us through many worlds of yogic experience. The steps in evolution, the many subtle worlds which lie beyond our sheerly physical vision, and the future possibilities are all dealt with in great detail.

As if from Matter's plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable's reign:

A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.
So it towered up to heights intangible
And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast
As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live
Near to his dream of the Invisible.⁸

Death has many faces; humanity's nescience is also Death and has to be overcome. This nescience can take many forms. It could be an arrogant politician rousing the rabble:

A bull-throat bellowed with its brazen tongue;
Its hard and shameless clamour filling space
And threatening all who dared to listen to truth
Claimed the monopoly of the battered ear;
A deafened acquiescence gave its vote,
And braggart dogmas shouted in the night
Kept for the fallen soul once deemed a god
The pride of its abysmal absolute (2.7).

Ashwapati's yoga grants him a vision of the Divine Mother, and he prays to her for an incarnation to help transform life on earth into a life divine. She assures him of such a manifestation:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power.
A limitless Mind that can contain the world,
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.
All might and greatnesses shall join in her;
Beauty shall walk celestial on the earth,
Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of her hair,
And in her body as on his homing tree
Immortal Love shall beat his glorious wings (3.4).

The second major change effected by Sri Aurobindo is the conversion of the *tri-rātra vrata* of Savitri into the 'Book of Yoga'. There is a brilliant image of Kundalini Yoga as Savitri draws close to the conclusion of her yoga:

Out of the Inconscient's soulless mindless Night
A flaming serpent rose released from sleep.
It rose billowing its coils and stood erect
And climbing mightily stormily on its way

It touched her centres with its flaming mouth:
As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,
They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light
and bliss;
Then at the crown it joined the Eternal's space.
In the flower of the head, in the flower of
Matter's base,
In each divine stronghold and Nature-knot
It held together the mystic stream which joins
The viewless summits with the unseen depths,
The string of forts that make the frail defence
Safeguarding us against the enormous world,
Our lines of self-expression in its Vast.
An image sat of the original Power
Wearing the mighty Mother's form and face (7.5).

Savitri gains the universal Consciousness that helps her face Death on that fateful day in the forest. The third great transformation effected by Sri Aurobindo is the manner in which the original Savitri-Yama conversation becomes a prolonged argument between Savitri and Death. Sri Aurobindo never uses the term 'Yama' for Death. Death here is Inconscience, Nescience, the great Negative. The young wife and the pitiless godhead argue through symbolic worlds of eternal night and double twilight. Savitri will not be tempted by any boons, and when she evokes the cosmic image of a tremendous blaze, Death is eaten away by Light.

In the final turn of the epic, Savitri finds that Death is but another facet of the Supreme. When the Supreme welcomes her to live in *ananda*, bliss, for ever in the heavens, she prefers to get back to the earth with all its tribulations:

In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss
Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine.
I keep my will to save the world and man (11.1).

From the Supreme she receives five boons—a divine Love, a divine Calm, a divine Oneness, a divine Energy and a divine Embrace—to help her

and Satyavan as they return to the earth to help humankind enter a great future. What is the core of Savitri's tapasya that gave her the strength of mind to face Death itself? We get the answer when she simply says to the rishis who question her after the couple return safely to the hermitage:

Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage (12).

Savitri contains the meditations and visions of a great yogi of our times who has pondered deeply the significance of the original legend. It is difficult to summarize its content in a short space, but K R Srinivasa Iyengar, who spent a lifetime studying the epic, has given some idea about the philosophical and spiritual treasures that are contained in it:

Poetry, meditation, exegesis; these are the movements of the same Consciousness, efflorescence of the same Revelation. The Divine Zenith, the Inconscient Nadir, the whole realm between: the way down, the way up, the whole stairway: the linking up of the extremities, the One Consciousness dividing only to unite again: the Mystery and Miracle of Creation, the Fall, the Ascension—all, all are suggested, all are invoked, all are shown in action in this unique and wonderful poem.⁹


The legend of Savitri has also been retold in English by other well-known poets like Romesh Chunder Dutt and Toru Dutt. The young Toru, who was hardly twenty when she wrote 'The Ballad of Savitri', admires the freedom enjoyed by women in ancient India:

In those far-off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas. On her ways
Savitri at her pleasure went
Whither she chose, and hour by hour
With young companions of her age,
She roamed the woods for fruit or flower,
Or loitered in some hermitage,

For to the Munis gray and old
Her presence was as sunshine glad,
They taught her wonders manifold
And gave her of the best they had.¹⁰

With such an introduction, we find it quite natural that Savitri grows up to be a '*tapo'nvitā*' and '*dhyāna-yoga-parāyaṇā*' as in Vyasa's tale. There is a charming conclusion marking the utter faith of the Indian people in the glory and good of Savitri's name:

As for Savitri, to this day
Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,
Be thou like her, in heart and head (81).

Though today we may be assaulted by a million temptations of the degrading culture of consumerism, still—whether it is the French poet Verlaine or the trans-creator Purushottama Lal, Savitri remains unchanged—the *kanyā tejasvinī* of Vyasa, the brilliance of Indian womanhood which continues to inspire and shape our thoughts. Savitri's faith, purity, simplicity, compassion, and love are as armour for us as we move forward in the twenty-first century. 

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May We All Be Nachiketas

Swami Divyasukhananda

IN the Upanishads we find abstract ideas elucidated through anecdotes and illustrative examples that make these texts a living philosophy and a great source of spiritual inspiration. The absorbing and illuminating dialogue between Yama and Nachiketa in the *Katha Upanishad* is one such narrative. This Upanishad boldly announces that only a seeker endowed with inner discipline can enter into the spiritual realm. The boy Nachiketa, the very embodiment of inner discipline, and Yama, the master of Self-knowledge who has pierced the mystery of life and death—the two main protagonists of this Upanishad—exemplify this truth.

The story of Yama and Nachiketa is also narrated in a skeletal form in the Rig Veda.¹ However, it is in the *Katha Upanishad* that the narrative has the distinctive flavour of a character-building spiritual philosophy. This Upanishad aims at illumining our intellects, taking us away from the finite towards the infinite, from the darkness of self-forgetfulness to the light of awareness, from death to immortality.

Swami Vivekananda had great love for Nachiketa. He said: 'Have faith, as Nachiketa. At the time of his father's sacrifice, faith came unto Nachiketa; ay, I wish that faith would come to each of you.'²

The Story of Nachiketa

In days of yore, Vajashravasa, desirous of the rewards of heaven, performed the Vishvajit sacrifice. This sacrifice demands that the performer give away all his possessions. Vajashravasa had a son named Nachiketa. He noticed the kind of gifts his father was giving: the cows presented to the assembled brahmanas were practically at the verge of death—'they had drunk water for the last time, eaten their last meal, been drained of all milk, and had turned barren.'³ Seeing the quality of the presents, Nachi-

keta, who was but a *kumāra*, a mere boy, was possessed by *śraddhā*, faith. Nachiketa realized that such gifts would only lead the performer of the sacrifice 'to worlds devoid of joy and happiness'. Moreover, Nachiketa thought: 'The evil result thus accruing to my father as a consequence of the imperfect sacrifice should be erased by me, who am a good son, by perfecting the sacrifice even through an offering of myself.' So he approached his father and said, 'Father, whom will you offer me to?' Having been ignored by his father, he repeated his question a second time, and then a third time. Annoyed, his father said, 'Unto death will I offer you.' To honour his father's words, Nachiketa went to the abode of Death, and stayed there without food for three days, as Yama, Death, was away. On return, Yama apologized for the delay in attending to his guest, and offered Nachiketa three boons for each of the three nights he had spent unattended.

As first boon, Nachiketa asked that his father Gautama be relieved of anxiety for him, become free of anger towards him, and recognize him and talk to him on his return from Yama's abode. As second boon, Nachiketa asked for the knowledge of the sacrifice that leads to heaven. These boons were immediately granted by Yama. Finally, as the last boon, Nachiketa asked for the knowledge of the Self, Atman. At first, Yama was not eager to impart this knowledge and tried to tempt Nachiketa with offers of material pleasure, but seeing Nachiketa's firm determination and intense longing, he yielded. Obtaining the knowledge of the Atman, Nachiketa overcame all desire and ignorance and became free.

Nachiketa's Character

In Nachiketa's personality we witness several remarkable qualities which make him fit for the

realization of the Atman. Below we explore some of these character-traits that make Nachiketa an example worthy of emulation.

Śraddhā · This is an attitude of faith, trust, or confidence in truth, righteousness, holy people, and the scriptures. *Śraddhā* is the foremost of the many positive qualities observed in Nachiketa's character.

Śraddhā in Himself: When Vajashravasa, in a fit of anger, declared that he was handing Nachiketa over to Death, the child wondered: 'Among many I rank as the foremost; among many I rank as one belonging to the middling, [but certainly I am never the last]. What purpose of Death does my father wish to achieve today through me?' (1.1.5). It is evident that even as a boy, Nachiketa had great faith in himself and never thought that he might be the worst among many, as Shankaracharya pointed out. This confidence eventually led to his meeting with Yama. This *śraddhā*, Swami Vivekananda highlights, 'is the keynote of the Veda and Vedānta—the Shraddha which emboldened Nachiketa to face Yama and question him, through which Shraddha this world moves.'⁴

Śraddhā in the Scriptures: Nachiketa was observing the distribution of gifts to the assembled brahmanas. He felt that his father ought to be making worthier offerings in his sacrifice as he had faith in the truths propounded by the scriptures. Nachiketa judged the incident in the light of that faith and came forward to question his father.

Śraddhā in the Teacher: While asking the third boon, Nachiketa said: 'Some say of a dead man, "He is gone"; others, "He is still living". You are Yama, Death; you know the truth. Do tell me.' Yama replied: 'Even the gods entertained doubts about this subject in days of yore; being subtle, the Self is not easily comprehended. Do not press me, choose another boon.'⁵ Reacting to these words with *śraddhā* Nachiketa said: '*Vaktā cāsyā tvāḍṛganyo na labhyo, nānyo varastulya etasya kaścit*; another exponent of this subject like you is not to be had, and no other boon is comparable to this' (1.1.22). Not only does this show Nachiketa's unswerving faith in Yama

as a teacher of *brahma-vidyā*, the knowledge of Brahman, it also shows his firm resolve about acquiring this knowledge. That is why he received the knowledge of the Self from Yama and became illumined.

Śraddhā in the Ancestors and the Holy: Nachiketa's father was remorseful for his harsh behaviour towards his son. But, at this critical juncture, Nachiketa urged his father to remember the honest ways of their forefathers and other holy people and not go back on his word. Nachiketa's views regarding the tradition of his ancestors and the holy are not only worth noting, but especially demand practice in today's world.

Truthfulness · By reminding his father of the ways of their ancestors, Nachiketa ensured that he did not deviate from truth even if that meant losing his son. '*Satyameva jayate nānṛtam*; truth alone prevails, not untruth,' says the *Mundaka Upanishad*, and Nachiketa had no doubt about this.⁶ When he arrived at Yama's abode, the latter was not at home. For three days Nachiketa went without food, waiting for Yama. He was willing to pay any price for the sake of truth.

Discrimination and Dispassion · Nachiketa wished to acquire the knowledge of the Self. Yama was not keen to grant this request and tried to tempt Nachiketa in various ways: 'Ask for sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years; partake freely of cattle, elephant, horses, and gold; choose a vast dominion on earth, and live as many years as you wish. ... Whatever desires are difficult to satisfy in this world of mortals, choose them as you wish: these fair maidens, with their chariots and musical instruments—men cannot obtain them. I give them to you and they shall wait upon you. But do not ask me about death.'⁷ Nachiketa was discrimination and renunciation personified, and rejected all these offers: 'O Death, these will endure only till the morrow; besides, they exhaust the vigour of the senses. Even the longest life is short indeed; so keep your horses, dances, and songs for yourself' (1.1.26).

Renunciation is the *sine qua non* of Self-knowledge. Nachiketa proved that he was steadfast

in his renunciation. Yama had to agree: 'I consider you fit for knowledge (of the Self)' (1.2.4). Swami Vivekananda remarks: 'Note here the conditions of imparting the truth. First, the purity—a boy, a pure, unclouded soul, asking the secret of the universe. Second, that he must take truth for truth's sake alone.'⁸

Concentration and Retentivity · While granting the second boon, Yama told Nachiketa about the sacrificial fire that takes one to heaven and the type and arrangement of bricks for the sacrificial altar. Such was Nachiketa's concentration and retentivity that, to Yama's utter surprise, he not only grasped the significance of the ritual, but also repeated verbatim the instructions he had received. A delighted Yama named the ritual after Nachiketa and also gave him a brilliant necklace.

Freedom from Pride · The fact that he could forego food for three days at Yama's place shows Nachiketa's capacity for great physical endurance. Moreover, he allows neither pride of lineage nor intellectual capabilities to disturb his innate modesty and mental equipoise even when he was made to wait without reception or food. This modesty is also seen in the way he questions his father's attitude: 'Father, whom will you offer me to?' The Vishvajit sacrifice demands the offering of all possessions, and Nachiketa saw himself as one of his father's possessions. He was also as courteous as ever in his rejection of Yama's offers: 'Wealth can never make a person happy. Moreover, since I have seen you, I shall certainly obtain wealth; I shall also live as long as you rule. So, the boon that I have asked alone is worth praying for.'⁹

Pragmatism · While asking the three boons, Nachiketa asked for Self-knowledge last. He sought peace of mind for his father and the knowledge of an important rite before inquiring about the ultimate Truth. This is a reflection of the pragmatic bent of Nachiketa's mind. It also reminds us that preparatory discipline is necessary for the realization of the Atman.

Interestingly, Nachiketa asked the first boon with the firm conviction that he would go back to

PRIYANATH SINHA



Yama greets Nachiketa

his father, even though he was in the clutches of Death! This is indicative of both his *śraddhā* and his pragmatism.

Ideals and ideologies are vital driving forces that propel human life and dictate human achievements. Thus, when one is firmly convinced about the value of truthfulness in thought, word, and deed, one's behaviour reflects this central tune of life. According to the Vedic sages, control of mind was the fundamental principle behind all learning. Living with their gurus, students learnt to have strong, dispassionate, pure, and concentrated minds, full of sublime thoughts. A person like Nachiketa fulfils the expectations of the Vedic sages as well as of teachers of all time.

It is generally emphasized that the outcome of any piece of knowledge should be judged by what students are able to do with it, and not merely by the fact of their possessing it. Nachiketa's understanding of scriptural injunctions was not merely a theoretical conception—it was a practical guide to right living. He even saw to it that his father's

sacrificial practices were set in proper order, so that he could obtain the results he desired.

The Illumined Soul

Life is a journey to fulfilment. The attainment depends upon the path one treads. The way of *preyas*, the path of profit and pleasure is fraught with tension, sorrow, and fear. The way of *śreyas*, the path of knowledge and illumination, provides an opportunity for freedom from all bondage—a rare privilege, given only to humans. Human minds are bewitched by the external glitter of objects and lose the discriminative faculty that helps recognize the purpose of life. Very few indeed choose the *śreyas* over the *preyas*. It is only the person with a profound discrimination that strives for Self-knowledge as the goal of life. Hence, Yama was delighted when he saw that Nachiketa was not deluded by the *preyas* and chose the path of *śreyas* instead.


Most people are mesmerized by the affairs of the world and cannot think beyond the world in which they live. So they remain ignorant of the Self. Even among those who are fortunate enough to hear about the Self, all cannot grasp the idea. When a fit disciple comes in contact with a great teacher, he or she has the chance of acquiring the knowledge of the Self through proper instruction and guidance.

S*hraddha* · Yogis adopt the means of reverential faith, energy, repeated recollection, concentration, and discriminative knowledge (and attain samadhi). The tranquillity that is experienced through reverential faith or *shraddha* sustains a yogi like a loving mother. Such faith gives a seeker after discriminative knowledge energy, which brings him (sustained) memory, which makes the mind undisturbed and collected and conducive to concentration. In such a mind dawns the light of discriminative knowledge by which the yogi understands the real nature of things. By retaining such knowledge and cultivating detachment towards all knowables one attains *asamprajnata samadhi*.

—Vyasa on Yoga Sutra, 1.20

The process has been likened to the lighting of one candle with another. Nachiketa is one such pure and capable student.

Nachiketa's doubts regarding existence beyond death were removed through spiritual illumination. This was possible because of his burning faith in the scriptures and in his teacher, Yama. The *Katha Upanishad* tells us that 'Having received the knowledge imparted by Yama, together with the entire process of yoga, Nachiketa became free from virtue and vice, as well as desire and ignorance, and attained Brahman' (2.3.18). It shows that spiritual fulfilment can do wonders to a person's character, permeating it with divine bliss, and that without authentic spiritual nourishment humans remain mere biological beings. Swami Vivekananda tells us: 'This is the watchword of the Vedanta—realize religion.'¹⁰ Nachiketa stands for this realization.

Being the embodiment of *śraddhā*, Nachiketa provides an ideal worthy of emulation for all time. He tells us that higher goals can only be attained through deep devotion to higher ideals, and a strong determination to transcend our lower nature. Deep indeed was Swami Vivekananda's love for Nachiketa and great was his confidence in the ideal that Nachiketa personified. He said: 'If I get ten or twelve boys with the faith of Nachiketa, I can turn the thoughts and pursuits of this country [India] in a new channel.' (7.231). May we all be Nachiketas and fulfil Swamiji's vision. 

References

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3. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.1.2-3.
4. *Complete Works*, 4.484.
5. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.1.20-21.
6. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.6.
7. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.1.23, 25.
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Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

5. *Yat prāpya na kiñcid vāñchati, na śocati, na dveṣṭi, na ramate, notsāhī bhavati.*

Having attained which [parā bhakti], one goes beyond all wants, becomes free from grief and hatred, does not rejoice over anything, and does not exert oneself in pursuit of self-interest.

NĀRADĪYĀ BHAKTI is based on jnana. It is based on the consciousness of identity [with the Divine], and this is the essence of jnana. Ordinary bhaktas are afraid of jnana, but bhakti is not emotion. Bhakti implies vibrations of the absolute Reality. No divine love can exist without the light of knowledge. Devotion means modifying ourselves in accordance with the nature of the beloved Deity, the absolute Reality.

The love that an ordinary lover feels in the beginning is replaced, when intensified, by lust and such other propensities. Therefore, Narada suggests that you ought to have right consciousness, right understanding about your beloved, God. Then, through absorption in love, this correct understanding will make you transcend the world and the ego.

Narada has pointed out the positive side of the fulfilment attained through bhakti. Now he explains the negative side of the same achievement. Fundamentally it is the same thing put in different words. Just as the statement 'my stomach is full' may be expressed in negative terms as 'I don't feel hungry'. Both aspects are stated for emphasis. Such a devotee has no desire, no sorrow, no hatred, no rejoicing, and does not exert oneself in self-interest.

Na kiñcid vāñchati; has no desire. The know-

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

ledge of the unreality of the world is a concomitant effect of the realization of the absolute Reality through love. So how can there be desire? When you are awake, you don't desire for the changing objects of dreams. Mathur Babu tried to tempt Sri Ramakrishna—to arouse desire in his mind. But, for Sri Ramakrishna, nothing existed except the Divine Mother. So he merged into samadhi. The thrust of this sutra is the absolute impossibility of any reaction based on the subject-object relationship in a bhakta. Not merely the five types of reactions mentioned in the sutra, but all reactions based on 'subject-object realism' vanish.

A person who has attained *parā bhakti* will not be dead like a stone. A *brahmajña*, knower of Brahman, also goes out for walks, asks for sugar in tea, and feels sympathy for others and happiness at their achievements. He is not like a wall. But he does not feel the world as real. Swami Vivekananda wept for the world. But he was fully conscious of the absolute Reality that appears in different forms.

Brahmajñas may appear to have desires, sorrows, joys, and the like. However, in their case, these are not reactions to the 'subject-object realism' but expressions of their transcendental identity with the absolute Reality—the reality underlying all, which is appearing as many. The consciousness of the *brahmajña* is different, so the effect of these emotions is also different. Sri Ramakrishna expressed sorrow when someone's son died, but he fell into samadhi while doing so. Ordinarily, sorrow might lead to fainting, but Sri Ramakrishna merged into samadhi. The reactions appear similar in form but are totally different in nature.

These are the criteria of a sadhu's life. As one advances towards real bhakti, perfection will come in one's life. This will be seen as the negative

achievements mentioned by Narada and marked by the disappearance of reactions due to the 'subject-object realism'. Your desires, sorrow, hatred, and the like—based on selfishness, personal interest, and the consciousness of 'I' and 'mine'—*must* vanish. If you have attained perfection, you are bound to be desire-less. Otherwise, yours is only an 'idea' of perfection or divinity.

6. *Yat jñātvā matto bhavati, stabdho bhavati, ātmārāmo bhavati.*

Realizing which, one becomes intoxicated and fascinated, and enjoys the bliss of the Atman.

The *labdhvā* and *prāpya* of *parā bhakti*, mentioned in the previous sutras, are not emotional expressions; nor are they achievements based on the subject-object relationship. They are transcendental achievements. This implied meaning is now explicitly stated by Narada through the phrase '*yat jñātvā*, realizing that'.

This realization has been indicated by such Upanishadic statements as '*tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumān-asī*; You are the man, You are the woman', and '*tameva bhāntam-anubhāti sarvaṁ, tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṁ vibhāti*; He shining, all these shine, through his lustre all these are variously illumined'.

To realize the glow of Consciousness or *cidvilāsa*, the play of Consciousness, is real achievement of bhakti. Sadhakas will achieve transcendental bhakti only if their basic consciousness is one of *tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumān-asī*, the Reality appearing as all.

Narada says that if you proceed with this consciousness then you will have more and more absorption in your beloved Deity, wherein there will be tremendous dynamism—one becomes intoxicated as it were, *matto bhavati*. This will be followed by transcendental tranquillity, like an undercurrent in the sea. One will experience that an all powerful dynamic pull is taking one to the bedrock of real Being.

The term *matta* signifies transcendental intoxication, not the ordinary excitement of the so-called bhaktas. It implies loss of individuality due to transcendental intoxication resulting from identifica-

tion with the absolute Consciousness.

Stabdha also suggests transcendental intoxication—without excitation, with absolute tranquillity.

Ātmārāma: The bhakta is one with the Atman, is identified with the bliss of the Atman. There is *mattatā* and absolute tranquillity because the world has vanished for such a devotee. Since, in the bhakta's consciousness, there is nothing but the Atman—the blissful all pervading Reality—there is *mattatā*, indescribable joy or *ānanda*, and *stabdhatā*.

Do you remember Swami Saradananda's description of Sri Ramakrishna's dance? He was like a fish swimming blissfully, to and fro, in the ocean of Brahman. This is the indescribable *ānanda* of absolute communion with Brahman, the reality of all, communion with one's own self, *svarūpa*, without consciousness of the subject-object dichotomy—the abode of absolute harmony expressing as harmony in movement. This is the state of *bhūmā* described in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*: '*yatra nānyat paśyati nānyat śṛṇoti nānyat vijānāti sa bhūmā*; the Infinite is where one does not see anything else, does not hear anything else, does not understand anything else'—no subject-object consciousness, absolute *stabdhatā*.

Thus Narada provides us with the criteria for judging our spiritual progress, on the lines of developing correct consciousness. Are you getting more and more attuned to Him (*mattatā*), becoming more and more tranquil (*stabdhatā*) because of the gradual disappearance of the subject-object consciousness, do you have your *ārāma*, contentment, in the Atman and nothing else? These must follow if you have fallen in love, not with any person but with *bhūmā*, the absolute Reality.

7. *Sā na kāmaya mānā, nirodha-rūpatvāt.*

Bhakti is not of the nature of lust, because it is a form of control.

Emotion leads to ruin and devotion to spiritualization. So the psychological characteristics of devotion, in contrast to emotion, are being pointed out by Narada. If you want to be a real bhakta,

you must remember these characteristics. Narada begins with a negative expression. In *parama prema*, which is synonymous with perfection, there is no subject-object consciousness. Hence there cannot be any desire or *kāma*. *Kāma* also means lust. *Na kāmamānā* signifies absence of any vibration or ripple of lust. Since lust is the arch-enemy of a sadhaka, it cannot remain in a true devotee.

Generally, lust is considered an unavoidable feature of the human organism, and its presence is taken for granted. It is even said that it has no antagonism to bhakti. People with such views say, 'You go on with your devotion; it is not hindered by lust. Lust is a natural phenomenon, like hunger, thirst, or excretion.' Such people do not even attempt to be free from lust, because they do not believe in a 'lust-less' mental state. They smile or connive at lust, and thus fall prey to it. Modern psychologists say that it is lust that is sublimated into divinity, which means that divinity is another form of lust. So they say that lust is the 'dark reality', unavoidable in humans. Narada comes to the rescue of the devotee: You already have weaknesses, and if your ideal is faulty, you will be nowhere. Do not think that divinity can be realized through so-called sublimation or suppression. They may have a relative value. The true path and goal is illumination, the transcendental illumination of the absolute Reality.

Narada states the impossibility of the coexistence of lust with *parā bhakti*. Ideal bhakti cannot allow even a trace of lust. *Nirodha* or restraint of desire is another aspect of *parā bhakti*. *Nirodha* and *parama prema* are the two aspects of *parā bhakti*, like the obverse and reverse of a coin. They are one and the same.

The nature of bhakti is such that lust must vanish from the bhakta. Disappearance of lust is a specific criterion of progress in real bhakti. With *kāma* or lust you cannot expect bhakti at all, because *kāma* has an overpowering nature. Lust-less-ness was the very being of Sri Ramakrishna's personality. He saw the Divine Mother in prostitutes. He would fall into samadhi on hearing vulgar slang [as all speech was derived from the Divine Mother].

8. *Nirodhastu loka-veda-vyāpāra-nyāsaḥ.*

Restraint or renunciation is consecration of all activities, sacred and secular [to the Divine].

Next, Narada describes the nature of *nirodha* in a perfect bhakta. *Nirodha* may mean control of lust and other desires. This is the nature of *nirodha* in an ordinary sadhaka, or a moralist. This is not the case with a real bhakta. Hence Narada uses the particle *tu*, but. In a real bhakta, who has realized the absolute Reality, there is no trace of subject-object consciousness. Total transcendence of lust is the nature of this *nirodha*. Such bhaktas do not see men as men or women as women; they clearly see and know men and women to be expressions of the lila of the absolute Reality.

Narada uses the expression '*loka-veda-vyāpāra-nyāsaḥ*', the giving up of all activities related to the world or enjoined by the Vedas. Karma, any activity, presupposes subject-object consciousness. If there is no subject, there is no object either. In such a situation, there cannot be any karma. Then all activity is *akarma*, non-karma, simply the lila of the Lord through name and form. This is the consciousness of the ideal bhakta who has realized the absolute Reality.

You have to struggle in the beginning, no doubt. But when you know the nature of ideal *nirodha*, your struggle will be in the correct direction; you will struggle to go beyond the 'subject-object realism' and try for total *nirodha* through illumination.

In the *Mandukya Karika*, Gaudapada takes up the issue of the so-called *nirodha* in contrast with transcendence. It is like trying to empty the ocean by repeatedly draining out its water with a straw. You will then have to wait for an eternity. You may run away from temptations for the time being, but that will not solve the problem. Hence Gaudapada says: transform your consciousness by illumination even as you struggle. When the bhakta attains the knowledge of the absolute Reality and is able to realize Bhagavan through love, *nirodha* will automatically be achieved. No ripple of lust can arise in such a person. (To be continued)

Light on Patanjali – II

Swami Sarvagatananda

Practise!

THE thirteenth aphorism [of the first chapter of the *Yoga Sutra*] defines practice as the continuous struggle to keep the [innate] tendencies perfectly restrained. For any knowledge we need both detachment and practice. That is why in our education we follow a disciplined method.

We get out of our regular environment, go to schools, confine ourselves to a particular classroom and teacher, and, by concentrating on the subject, we learn. Also, when studying at home we make use of detachment by keeping away from all other things at that time.

In yoga, practice and detachment are all the more necessary because you are dealing with your own mind—one of the worst and one of the best things in the world. This mind is everything from the point of human life. The whole secret lies in knowing your own mind; you get the awareness of your true nature—call it God or by any name, behind your mind is the whole truth. That is why in raja yoga the whole discipline is in the mind. Through mental discipline, through mind control, one comes to know one's true nature. When people talk about God-realization, realization of Truth, realization of Brahman, these are all mere words, the experience is the realization of your true nature.

What is it in your present condition that stands between you and your true nature? The contents

of your mind. Whatever you have accumulated, acquired, heard, read, imagined, seen, dreamt has piled up in your mind-stuff. These impressions do not allow you to see your own true nature. You have to purify your mind. How? How do you purify water? You remove all foreign elements from it; it is filtered, distilled, even re-distilled, until the water contains nothing but water. So also, purity of mind means that there should be nothing else there. What else is there? Look at your own mind.

All your knowledge and experience, bundled up, is your mind; and it is acquired, it is not your true nature. No doubt, in a subtle way, certain things have come; they are also in the mind-stuff, along with what you acquired in this life.

Behind this mind-stuff is the pure Light, this Light does not shine through it [freely]. How do you purify this mind? You cannot remove from the mind these thoughts and ideas. They will all be there, you cannot touch them, but you can silence them, integrate them, harmonize them.

How do you silence them? Patanjali says, by dispassion and practice. Suppose somebody is knocking at the door and you do not open it, how long will he knock? Dispassion means not opening the door—don't be attached to the thoughts.

Now, suppose that you are knocking at the door—in this case you know from the words of realized souls that the door will be opened—don't go away from the door, be there knocking. Practice means to be at it. Therefore be at it, be detached from all your thoughts, constantly. You are happy or unhappy simply because of your attachment to thoughts and ideas. Test yourself: when you are a bit happy find out what happened. A few seconds

The text is a compilation of minimally edited extracts from the author's book *Meditation as Spiritual Culmination: Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Boston: Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, 2005). The book is a transcript of the author's lectures on raja yoga, delivered between September 1977 and June 1981, at Boston.

ago you were calm, now suddenly you are elated, why? Something came to your mind—some idea, some information—and now you are happy. Imagine! It was just an idea that came, nothing else, and immediately you are disturbed or happy. See what ideas can do! An aeroplane crashes somewhere, if none of the victims are related to you, you feel sorry but not disturbed; if one of the victims is your own, immediately you are disturbed—it is the same news, attachment is the difference; you identify with the victim. This is the case not only with persons but also with thoughts. Somebody tells you something; you identify with the thought and become miserable. Not only are you miserable, you make others miserable. Examine all the thoughts. If any disturbance comes to your mind, any misery, any dislike, behind that disturbance is attachment. Be detached, and practise, be constantly at it. Don't allow any thought to crowd you, to distract you, to influence you, to drag you down.

Don't take any thought lightly. A thought by itself may be nothing, but the effect is cumulative: if you are told that somebody is bad, the first few times you may not take it seriously, by the fourth time you become biased—for nothing, as you don't know the truth.

The accumulation of thoughts creates prejudice in our minds. All prejudices are based on this tendency. We don't examine our thoughts, we accept them. Even if they are factual, what right have you to disturb yourself? Suppose it is true, why should you drag yourself there? Detachment is very important, as is its practice.

Mindfulness

The effect of practice is described in the fourteenth aphorism: 'It becomes firmly grounded by long constant effort, with great love and devotion for the end to be attained.' This practice must be done continuously, constantly—not just examining once and then haphazardly or no more. If you want to make a tight, strong barricade, it must be a continuous process, a long constant effort. Be constant, you must be at it.

This is what Buddha exhorted: 'Be mindful, be alert.' Don't allow any thought to come up. You must practise constantly.

It is the same in any art; if you practise once a month your music lessons, what do you get out of it? If you want to be something you have to practise every day; then 'it becomes firmly grounded by long constant effort, with great love and devotion'. You must be at it, you must love the practice; then it becomes grounded.

Those who are spiritually set must be very, very careful that there is no light-mindedness; otherwise they can suffer a lot. Be at it, be aware, be mindful, be alert. You have to avoid three types of laziness—physical, mental, and spiritual.

Physical laziness is not keeping good health, being given more to sleep, eating too much, indulging in unhealthy foods—these pull the mind down. Mental laziness is daydreaming, not keeping alert, allowing negative thoughts to come and tip you over. A thought becomes powerful when you are interested in it, when you pay attention to it—you are to avoid both. By repeating a thought it becomes powerful. Don't allow it to come and crowd you when your mind is at leisure. Keep the mind always active, purposeful, on something positive; then there is no chance for a negative thought to come in.

When you are at leisure the mind goes down, that is the mind's natural tendency. Sri Ramakrishna gave a good example: 'When you pour water, where does it go? To the lowest level.' An uncontrolled mind also seeks the lowest things, the easiest things, sensate things, worldly things. Therefore do not allow the mind to lose its ground; hold it always.

Spiritual laziness is when there is no ideal, no purpose, no goal in life. We get up in the morning, go to a job, then go to a movie, or do this and that; we spend our time in a purposeless way, with no goal or ideal. These three types of laziness can pull you down, disturb you. Practice means to be at it. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Restraint does not come in one day, but by long continued practice.'

You have to practise many times a day. It is not mechanical. Many times certain rituals, religious practices look mechanical—but the mind must be there to get the full meaning; then you gain more depth. It is a constant struggle, a constant practice. In human life, struggle we must for our existence, survival, comfortable life, for anything we desire. Without struggle, nothing comes.

As you have to struggle anyway, why don't you struggle for some higher purpose? Keep a goal. You have to struggle, you cannot exist without struggling; this the Gita says.

In spiritual life there are many disciplines that must be regularly followed without omissions. Why? Because you have to create a new psyche, because you have to dehypnotize yourself. In the creation of a new psyche you have to be at it constantly because the old habits are so strong, accumulated, powerful.

To undo them you have to do something positive, constructive, healthy, and spiritual. The old habits do not go easily, you cannot destroy them. You have to remain detached and create new habits.

As these new habits become more and more powerful, they do not allow negative tendencies to arise. A time comes when this mind gains a purpose, gains strength; then the old habits slowly fade away.

How are the unruly, the violent, the sinful reformed? First they are taken away from society, isolated—that is detachment. Then they are taught something positive, a vocation—that is practice. Society isolates but does not reform, for that requires a lot of time, constant attention, and a lot of money.

Mahatma Gandhi once experimented along these lines in one of the states of India. All the prisoners were taken out of jails, put on a six-hundred-acre plot, and taught farming, weaving, and carpentry. The experiment worked well for some time; many people came out from it, well set for life in society; but later, politicians interfered with its operation. Also, the individual attention required made it very costly.

The reformation of our mind follows the same rules as does the reformation of the prisoner, that is, isolation and practice. Get away from society for some time, think for yourself, examine your own thoughts, give your mind some constructive thoughts.

Fortunately we have on hand the teachings of the Upanishads, of all the great saints of the world: Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Krishna, and also other great souls. From them we can learn how to make our lives fruitful. Detachment is most important here, without it practice has no meaning. You cannot teach any serious subject to a child playing in a crowd, you have to take him away from there.

Detachment

'Renunciation is the power of battling against these forces and holding the mind in check,' says Swami Vivekananda. Thoughts come, but do not create ripples. How? By detachment.

If somebody unknown dies, you are not disturbed; if somebody close to you dies, then immediately your mind becomes agitated because of the lack of detachment. Be detached, then you can be concerned, without being disturbed, you can act positively: 'How can I help? What is to be done?'

This renunciation is what I want. I am passing through a street, and a man comes and takes away my watch. That is my own experience. I see it myself, and it immediately throws my *chitta*, the mind-stuff, into a wave, taking the form of anger. Do not allow that anger to come. Raja yoga does not tell me to keep quiet and let the man take everything away from me. By not being disturbed, thrown into anger, I can use my intelligence properly, I can be more constructive and practical. The following experience of a monk shows how one can be effective without being disturbed: A monk is travelling in a crowded train from Bombay to Pune. There are seats for forty in the car and eighty are already there. A strong man stands at the door and prevents more from entering. Then at one station an elderly lady tries to get in; this man prevents her. The train starts moving and she is holding to the outside of

the car. The monk gets up slowly, comes to the door, bodily lifts the man and puts him aside, opens the door, brings the lady inside, closes the door, and sits down again, without saying one word.

The train travels sixty miles further, people are coming and going, nobody says anything; there is absolute silence. Everything goes on well. That is effective work. There is no anger, no argument. The monk is absolutely detached; he does what is necessary and goes back to his corner. You can be more effective if you are cool and calm. Anger disturbs you; you lose your mind for nothing. A show of anger has its place, but be not angry. Swami Vivekananda says: Anger throws one off balance. Allow not that to come. If you cannot prevent that, you are nothing; if you can, you have *vairagya*, renunciation.

Sensate feelings come, how does one stop them? By dispassion, by detachment. Many times we stop them out of helplessness, out of social necessity. But they all can be silenced easily when you yourself analyse them: 'No, that is not good.'

To deny them, and not allow the mind to come to a wave form with regard to them, is renunciation. 'Not coming to a wave form' means to not allow the mind to be disturbed by anything that happens. This is an art which you have to practise regularly.

Once you lose your mind, you are gone, you cannot think. This sequence of events is described in the Bhagavadgita: When anger comes, what happens? Anger throws you into confusion. When there is confusion in your mind, you cannot remember things properly. When you cannot remember things properly, the wisdom that you have gained you will lose. When you lose your wisdom, you are lost.

Anger finally leads you to losing your ground. It is a very mysterious psychological process, which can happen to you by just contemplating one thought. Examine yourself and find out what throws you off.

How Did We Get Ourselves into This Mess?

Question: If we all started from the Truth, then how did we get ourselves into this mess?


Answer: This question was asked of Swami Vivekananda nearly eighty-five years ago. He said: The Hindu is bold enough to say, 'I do not know.' How we got into this mess we do not know, honestly, except to say that God threw us into this hell. God created me and said: 'Get out', and pushed me into this. Here I am, searching here and there. This is one explanation: God threw us into this and we are helpless.

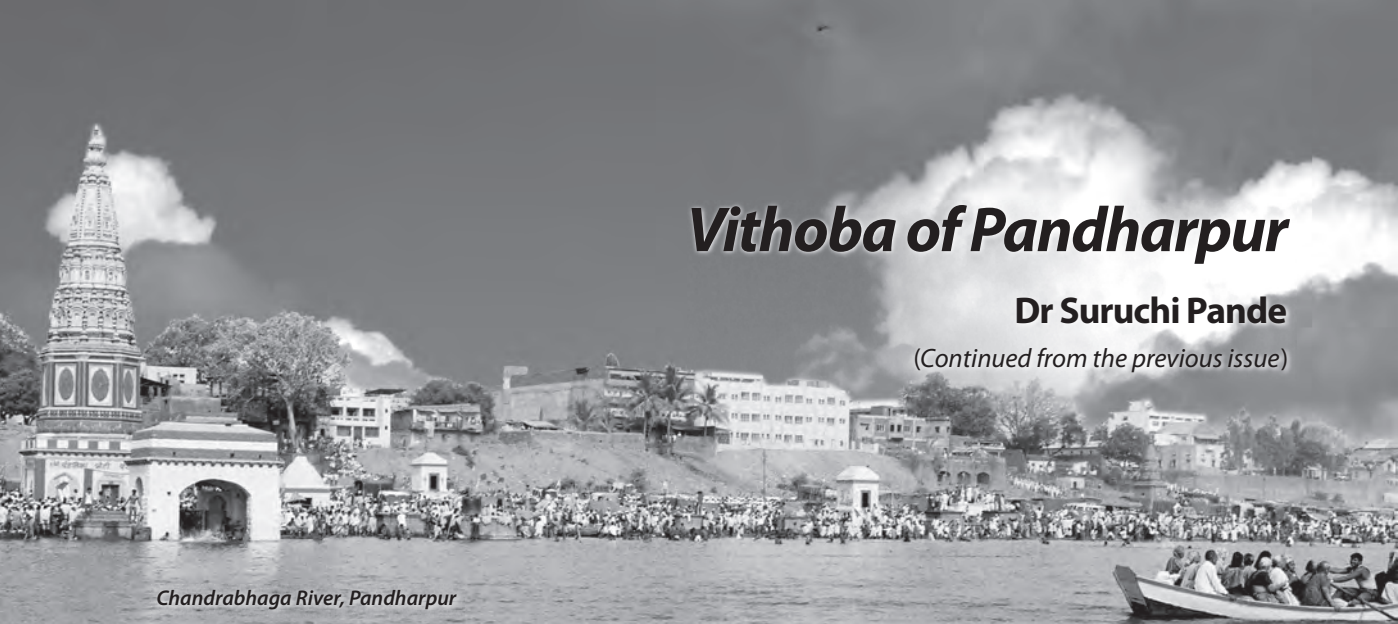
Question: He is not very kind to us.

Answer: He is not very kind from that standpoint. But there is another aspect to it: I do not know how this whole mess started but I know how to get out of it. Shankara gives a beautiful example: Suppose you enter a deep, dark cave, and standing there ask: 'How long has this darkness been here?' You cannot answer this question. But Shankara said: 'I do not know how long it has been dark here but I can tell you how to get rid of it: bring a light.' The darkness doesn't say: 'I have been here for the last two billion years, I cannot go right away.' That darkness goes away immediately when one strikes a little match. Knowledge is like that match.

I do not know the cause of this mess, how it came about, but I can get rid of it by means of raja yoga. Buddha said the same thing: 'We can get rid of the clinging that is within us. We do not need to go to the scriptures to learn who created it, when it was created, how long it is here. Don't worry about all these things, you can get out of this now, destroy the clinging.'

'Being detached' means that. Be detached from the external and the internal, and you will get it, Patanjali said. 'We do not know how long it has been there, how many births we have gone through.' In the Gita Sri Krishna tells Arjuna the same thing: 'You and I have passed through many births, O Arjuna; I know them all, you do not.' We do not know.

This is the beauty of it: we do not know how it started, but we know how to get out of it. All these books are for this purpose, to get out of this cosmic mess. We do not know who created this. 



Chandrabhaga River, Pandharpur

Vithoba of Pandharpur

Dr Suruchi Pande

(Continued from the previous issue)

REFERENCES to Pandharpur and Vitthala are found in the Puranas, in the *abhāṅgas* (hymns) of the saints, in stone inscriptions, and in popular literature.

Early References to Pandharpur and Vitthala⁶

Puranic Sources • The *sthālamahatmyas* (chapters on 'greatness of sacred sites') in the Puranas contain a wealth of fable, legend, and historical information as well as reflections on ancient traditions and indigenous culture.

The *Skanda* and *Padma Puranas* refer to places known as Panduranga-kshetra and Pundarika-kshetra or Paundarika-kshetra. The *Padma Purana* also mentions Dindiravana, Lohadanda-kshetra, Lakshmi-tirtha, and Mallikarjuna-vana, names that are associated with Pandharpur. There are mythical tales connected to these popular names. For instance, the Dindiravana forest was so named because it was associated with the demon Dindirava. When his arrogance crossed all limits, Vishnu took the form of Mallikarjuna Shiva and put him to death with an iron rod, *lohadanda*.

Again, when Krishna started showing greater affection for Radha, Rukmini was displeased, and leaving Krishna in Dwaraka, she went away to Dindiravana on the River Bhima. In order to pacify her, Krishna came to Dindiravana with his cowherd companions, the *gopas*. They camped at Gopalpur while Krishna went to meet Rukmini.

So the Gopalakrishna of Gopalpur is an important deity even today. While he was looking for Rukmini, Krishna also met the famous devotee Pundalika.

Another legend tells of the beautiful Padma who was performing hard penance to get a suitable husband. Satisfied with her tapas, the Deity appeared before her in a very handsome form. Seeing him, Padma lost consciousness, her hair all-dishevelled (*muktakeshi*). Her wish was granted and the place of her tapas became 'Kshetra Muktakeshi'.

There are stories related to the names of various places in the Pandharpur Kshetra. These are also attempts at synthesizing the cults of Shiva and Vishnu or the Sri Venkatesha and Sri Vitthala form of Vishnu. It is interesting to note that Venkatesha and Vitthala do not have any prominent place in the Puranas, but they are extremely popular deities. And there are interesting parallels in their tradition. Vitthala is adored in his *balarupa* (child form) and Venkatesha is *balaji*.⁷ Both their consorts stay apart. Padmavati, Venkatesha's wife, was displeased with her husband for tolerating Bhṛigu's insult. So she went away, first to Karavira and then to Tiruchanur, three miles away from Tirumalai, where Venkatesha resides. Both Venkatesha and Vitthala do not carry any weapons. Some of the images of these deities obtained from archaeological excavations also show similarities. Both the icons are *katinyasta kara* (having their hands on their waist). The *Panduranga-shataka* by Sri Shankaracharya explains the reason:

Vithoba of Pandharpur

*Pramanam bhavabdheridam mamakanam
Nitambah karabhyam dbrito yena tasmāt
Vidhaturvasatyaihi dbrito nabhikoshah
Parabrahmalingam bhaje pandurangam*

I pray to the Panduranga, the representation of Para-brahman, who rested his hands on his waist to show his devotees the depth of the ocean of samsara, and who holds a (lotus) bud in his navel for Vidhata (Brahma) to stay.⁸

Stone Inscriptions • The beam on the eastern door of the Solakhambi Mandap bears a Sanskrit-Kannada inscription (c. 12th cent. CE) written in Devanagari, which says that the Hoyasala Yadava Vir Someshwara donated the land of Hiriyaganja for the service—*angabhoga* and *rangabhoga* of Sri Vitthala. The Chauryanshicha Shilalekha is another famous inscription. *Chauryanshi* is eighty-four in Marathi. It is believed that rubbing one's back on the surface of this stone inscription provides liberation from eighty-four lakh births. Experts believe that this inscription can be dated to seventeen years before the composition of the *Jnaneshwari* text (c. 1290 CE). Another inscription from Hebali near Dharwad—dated to 1248 CE—bears the phrase 'Sri Pandurangeya Sri Vitthaladevara'.⁹

It can be reasonably inferred from historical records that Vitthala and Pandharpur started gaining widespread popularity and loving acceptance among the masses after the 6th cent. CE. A copper-plate inscription of that period mentions Pandharpur as a *palli* (small village), while in the inscription of the Hoyasalas it is a *mahagrama* (big village or town). This transition is suggestive of the growth of devotion to Vitthala.

A stone inscription in the Vitthala Temple



The Meaning of 'Varkari'

Every Maharashtra is familiar with the term 'Varkari'. It brings to mind a characteristic image: a person dressed in dhoti and *uparane* (a small piece of cloth worn loosely round the shoulders), with *bukka* on the forehead, a rosary of tulsi beads round the neck, *tal* (cymbals) in hand, a saffron flag on the shoulder, continuously repeating '*ramakrishna hari*'. A Varkari is one who religiously performs the *vari* (pilgrimage) to Pandharpur on foot, especially during the months of Ashadha (mid June to mid July) and Kartika (mid October to mid November). Many people go on pilgrimages, but the term 'Varkari' has got exclusively associated with the pilgrimage to Pandharpur. The term not only suggests a specific appearance, it also suggests the espousal of a particular philosophy and a certain way of life. The Varkari *sampradaya* (tradition) has also produced a succession of distinguished and elevated saints.

One who goes to Pandharpur on a *vari* is a Varkar or Varkari. There are several opinions about the origin of the term. According to Sri Rajvade *vari* means a group or a mass of particulars or individuals (2). The *Amarakosha* mentions *vara* as synonymous with *sanghata* and *samudaya* (that is, a group) as well as *avasara*, opportune time.¹⁰ The *Jnaneshwari* also mentions *vari*:

*Yachi ekepari, rupakachiya kusari;
Saritase vari, samsarachi.*

From this (simile of a tree), the Lord has skilfully shown the futility of the world and has given a way out of the cycle of birth and death.¹¹

*Aise vairagya he kari, tari sankalpachi sare vari;
Sukhe dbriticha dhavalari, buddhi nande.*

When thus dispassion is achieved the resolve [for enjoyment] becomes powerless, the seeker gets courage and the pure intellect starts working (6.377).



A Varkari

Here the word *vari* means ‘a trip, rounds, or going about.’¹² According to Molesworth’s *Marathi-English Dictionary*, *vari* means ‘the practice of proceeding regularly at recurring monthly or annual periods on pilgrimage to any sacred place’. The practices of various saints and devotees have given ‘Varkari’ its current meaning ‘the ritual pilgrimage to Pandharpur’. In every village and in every city of Maharashtra we find people who proudly call themselves Varkaris.

The Varkari *sampradaya* is also called the Malkari or Bhagavata *sampradaya*. Why are Varkaris called Malkaris? This is because they wear a rosary of tulsi beads, and tulsi is dear to Vitthala. This rosary is the symbol of a life dedicated to Vitthala. One who offers everything to Bhagavan is a *bhagavata*. The term suggests a preponderance of bhakti, devotion. The *Eknathi Bhagavata* text says:

*Dara sutagrihaprana karave bhagavantasi arpana;
He bhagvatadharma purna mukhyatve
bhajan ya nava.*

The true sense of the Bhagavata religion is in dedication of one’s wife, children, home, and life to Bhagavan. Bhajan is the name (main feature) of this (dharma).¹³

Having dedicated themselves to God, the Varikaras are naturally generous:

*Kaya vacha mane jive sarvasve udara;
Bapa rakhumadevi-vara vitthalacha varikara.*

The Varikara, whose father is Vitthala—the husband of Rakhumadevi—is generous with all of his body, speech, mind, and life.¹⁴

The Varkari Code of Conduct

The Varkaris follow the tradition of *vari* to Pandharpur. There is also a tradition of *vari* to Alandi, the birthplace of Jnaneshwar. Ashadha Shuddha Ekadashi is the important day at Pandharpur and Kartika Vadya Ekadashi at Alandi. During the *vari* to both these places, bhajans are sung from *dashami* (the tenth day of the fortnight) to *purnima* or *amavasya* (the full- and new-moon days). On *purnima*, all *dindis* (groups) involved in the *vari*

go to Gopalpur near Pandharpur. The ceremony of offering *kala* (parched grains of jowar mixed with curd) is performed here. All the Varkaris partake of this *kala* as pious prasad and here ends their holy journey.

The Varkari families follow the tradition of *vari* with love and devotion from generation to generation. With exalted minds they walk tirelessly to Pandharpur, unmindful of scorching heat or pouring rain. Jnaneshwar and Namdev have beautifully described the congregation of these Varkaris. Jnaneshwar says:

*Anande preme garjati bhadrajati vitthalache;
Tulasimala shobhati kanthi gopichandanachi uti.
Aise ekangavira vitthalarayache dingara;
Baparakhumadevivar jahi nirdhari jodala.*

(These Varkaris), adorned with tulsi garland round their necks and sandal-paste on their forehead, announce the (name of the) pious Vitthala. Staunch followers, brave men, they are the children of Vitthalaraya. They have united themselves firmly to their father Vitthala, the consort of Rakhumadevi (ibid.).

Namdev who was contemporaneous with Jnaneshwar says:

*Ale ale re hariche dingara
Vira varikar pandhariche;
Bhakti premabhava bharale jyanchya angi
Nachati harirangi nenati laju.*

Here come the children of Hari, the brave Varikaras of Pandharpur, whose being is full of devotion and love. Coloured by Hari, they dance without reserve (5).

It is interesting to note that though the Bhagavata *sampradaya* emphasizes bhakti, the forms of its *upasana* (spiritual practices) tend towards Advaita. Though in their works Jnaneshwar and Namdev speak of ‘*krishnamurti savali*’; the black image of Krishna, or say, ‘*bridayi krishnamurti bheto ali*’; the image of Krishna came to meet me deep in my heart’, the magnificent concept of ‘*vishvakara harirupa*’; the cosmic form of Hari’ finds repeated expression in the compositions of the Varkari saints.

Wearing a rosary of tulsi beads is of utmost impor-

tance to the Varkaris. Vitthala is the child (*balasvarupa*) Krishna. The tulsi plant is dear to Krishna. So a Varikara must wear a rosary containing a hundred and eight tulsi beads as a pious observance. If the thread of the rosary happens to snap, the staunch Varikara would not have food until the rosary is repaired. There is a touching story about tulsi among the Kunbis (an agricultural community) in Maharashtra. It goes like this: Tulsi was the daughter of a poor brahmana. She had a dark complexion and a brahmana husband was not in her fate. Due to poverty, her hapless father deserted her. The *gavali* (cow-herd) Vithoba offered refuge to orphaned Tulsi. But Rukmini was not happy with Vitthala's overtures. Rukmini's attitude hurt Tulsi and she decided to take shelter with Mother Earth. As she was disappearing in the bosom of the earth, Vithoba hurriedly pulled her out. But instead of Tulsi, the holy basil (tulsi) came into his hands. Vithoba had promised to marry Tulsi. He kept his words by marrying the holy basil. This is the reason why Vithoba always has a garland of tulsi around his neck.

The rosary keeps the Varkaris alert about their ideals right up to the end of their lives. Sandal-paste (*gopi-chandan*) and black-powder (*bukka*) marks on the forehead, and the saffron flag carried on the shoulder are the other important components of their insignia. There are certain moral and ethical precepts that every Varkari is to follow:

- Adherence to truth.
- Treating all women other than one's own wife as Rakhumai (Mother Rukmini).
- Confessing unintentional transgressions to Bhagavan and praying for his forgiveness.
- Being a vegetarian.
- Visiting Pandharpur and Alandi at least once a year.
- Observance of *ekadashi* fasts.
- Japa of one's mantra at least a hundred and eight times every day.
- Daily study and contemplation of such texts as the *Jnaneshwari* and *Haripatha*.
- Performing all household duties with compassion but non-attachment, maintaining the awareness of Vitthala.



Procession of Varkaris proceeding to Pandharpur

The Varkari philosophy advises devotees to face miseries and hindrances with courage and firmness of mind and rise above *samsara*. No work is futile. We get our share of work because God wishes it to be so. We should work keeping in mind that it is our pious duty to do so and that we are answerable to God. The Varkaris are divided into several sub-sects, each having its own mantra:

- Chaitanya Sampradaya: It has two divisions; one group repeats the mantra '*ramakrishna hari*', while the other repeats '*om namo bhagavate vasudevaya*'.
- Swarupa Sampradaya: Their mantra is '*sriram jaya ram jaya jaya ram*'. This *sampradaya* has two divisions—the Ramanuji and the Ramanandi.
- Ananda Sampradaya: The followers of this *sampradaya* repeat the name '*sriram*' or '*ram*'.
- Prakasha Sampradaya: Members of this *sampradaya* chant the mantra '*om namo narayanaya*'.¹⁵

History of the Varkari Sampradaya

It is convenient to divide the history of the Varkari *sampradaya* into five phases:

- (1) From Pundalika to Jnaneshwar
- (2) From Jnaneshwar to Namdev
- (3) The period of Bhanudas and Eknath
- (4) The Tukaram period
- (5) The post-Tukaram period

From Pundalika to Jnaneshwar • The exact time of the devotee Pundalika (or Pundarika) is uncertain. The *Padma Purana* and the *Skanda Purana* tell the story of Pundalika. Pundalika was



Devotees performing parikrama (circumambulation) at the Vitthoba Temple in Pandharpur

Prabuddha Bharata

tioned earlier also refers to the temple of Vitthala.

In his book *Malutaran*, Narahari Dhundiraj Malu suggests that King Shalivahana, who is reputed to have initiated the Shaka era, established the town of Pandharpur, placing it under the charge of his chief minister Ramachandra Sonar. The forest of Dindiravana was cleared to erect the temple of Panduranga and a few other temples. This text does not appear to be backed by adequate historical evidence; but if there is any truth in it, then the legend of Pundalika and the temple of Vitthala goes back to the 1st cent. CE.¹⁶

It is, however, indisputable that the Vitthala-bhakti cult was well established by the 6th cent. CE. After this period the cult underwent remarkable growth and spread. There is no specific reference clarifying the origin of the *vari* tradition. But there were people who followed the tradition of *vari* to Pandharpur well before the time of Jnaneshwar. Namdev says that Vitthalapant, Jnaneshwar's father, did the Ashadhi and Kartiki *varis*. People used to come for the darshan of Vitthala from all over Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka at this time.

(To be concluded)

[The image of Vitthoba in the August number (p. 448) was courtesy of Sri Chaitanya Deglurkar.]

an ordinary man madly in love with his wife. Due to this inordinate attachment he tended to neglect his own aged parents. Eventually, he met Kukkuta Swami and underwent a radical transformation; service to parents became his foremost priority.

Another story goes like this: When Vitthala was searching for Rukmini in the Dindiravana forest, he happened to chance upon Pundalika's house. Pundalika was busy serving his parents. So he provided a brick for Vitthala to rest on. Vitthala stood on the brick and waited patiently for his devotee. After completing his services, Pundalika prayed to Vitthala and sang his glories. The deity was pleased and he asked Pundalika what he desired most. Pundalika requested Vitthala 'to stay here permanently and lift jivas from ignorance'. Vitthala happily assented to the loving demands of his devotee. Hence the place came to be known as Pundarikapur.

There is no unanimity about the period of the Puranas. So it is difficult to ascertain when Pundalika lived. It can be inferred from epigraphic evidence that at least half a century before the time of Jnaneshwar people knew a sage called Pundalika Muni. The *Panduranga-shataka-stotra* composed by Sri Shankaracharya refers to Pundalika. Sri Shankaracharya is generally believed to have flourished around the 8th cent. CE. It follows that Pundalika and Vitthala were well-known by this time. The Rashtrakuta copperplate inscription of 516 CE men-

Notes and References

6. The discussion in this section is based on *Sri Vitthala: Ek Mahasamanvaya*.
7. Incidentally, Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, had this to say about Balaji of Tirupati the very first time he saw the deity: 'I see a female deity here!' Apparently the temple originally belonged to a female deity. The word *bala* also indicates a female deity.
8. *Panduranga-shataka*, verse 3.
9. B P Bahirat, *Varkari Sampradaya: Uday va Vikas* (Pune: Venus, 1988), 23-4.
10. *Amarakosha*, 2.5.39 and 3.3.162.
11. *Jnaneshwari*, 15.42.
12. *Varkari Sampradaya*, 3.
13. *Eknathi Bhagavata*, 2.298.
14. *Varkari Sampradaya*, 4.
15. *Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosha*, ed. Mahadevashastry Joshi (Pune: Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosha Mandala, 1993), 8.607-8.
16. *Varkari Sampradaya*, 25.

Ramakrishna's Influence on Girish's Plays

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



THE following is a conversation that Girish had with a devotee regarding the play *Vilwamangal*:

A devotee: 'You have written so many dramas and created innumerable characters.'

Girish: 'I could not create a small part of what Ramakrishna has created.'

Devotee: 'You are really a great actor.'

Girish: 'My goodness! In acting, I could not even come close to him.'

Devotee: 'Why?'

Girish: 'One day the Master demonstrated how a false monk behaves, and I tried to show this in the character of Sadhak in *Vilwamangal*. Sadhak was trying to make Bhikshuk, a thief, his disciple. Let me give you an example.'

Bhikshuk: 'Will you maintain silence or talk?'

Sadhak: 'I shall talk with those whom I think fit.'

Bhikshuk: 'Will you light a dhuni fire?'

Sadhak: 'Sometimes.'

Bhikshuk: 'Will you keep a Bhairavi [a woman companion]?'

Sadhak: 'Secretly.'

Bhikshuk: 'Shall I ask people to give you money or not?'

Sadhak: 'There will be a pot for the homa fire in front of me, where people will drop money according to their means.'

Bhikshuk: 'Where will you stay?'

Sadhak: 'I shall find a Shiva temple nearby.'¹⁰

Girish continued: 'The Master was an expert in studying and observing human character. He could imitate exactly the gestures and deportment of both men and women. He said: "There is a kind of monk who wears a long cloak. He has a necklace

of *rudraksha* beads around his neck, strung with a gold or silver string, and in between the beads there are a few precious stones. He behaves as if he is omniscient." I portrayed the Master's description of a hypocrite monk in the character of Sadhak' (59). Although Girish portrayed himself in the character of Vilwamangal, he acted in the role of Sadhak.¹¹

Girish depicted Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences in the following song, which the character Pagalini sang:

He [Krishna] wanders with me holding my hand.
Wherever I go, He follows me,
Even if I don't call Him.
He wipes my face with great care,
And intently looks at my face.
When I smile, He smiles; and when I cry,
He cries.
How lovingly He takes care of me.
So I came to know:
who says that the Precious One does not exist?
Come and see for yourself whether it is true
or false.
He is talking to me with great love.¹²

When Vilwamangal came to the ferry ghat to cross the river on a stormy night, he saw Pagalini at the cremation ground and requested her divine help to enable him to meet his beloved Chintamani by crossing the river. Girish wrote this song for Pagalini to sing, which depicts Ramakrishna's longing for the Divine Mother:

Where, friend, where is my Chintamani?¹³
 Tell me, where has he gone?
 I have gone mad
 having lost the jewel of my heart.
 Look, I have come to the cremation ground
 But he is not here.
 In caves and forests, how many days
 Have I spent weeping for him?
 Sometimes I besmear my body with ashes,
 But the burning of my heart
 is not thereby allayed.
 I roam in this empty world enduring
 the pain of a thunderbolt in my chest;
 Still I cannot find his whereabouts.
 He is the delight of my heart,
 I ever pine for a sight of him (4.268–9).

When Vilwamangal said that Chintamani was a woman's name, Pagalini replied: 'Chintamani is sometimes the Divine Mother Kali and sometimes Krishna. He is Purusha and Prakriti.' These are all Ramakrishna's ideas. This drama illustrates how Girish's mind was saturated with Ramakrishna's life and philosophy.

Seeing the setting sun and hearing the vesper music in the Dakshineswar temple garden, Ramakrishna used to cry: 'Mother, another day is gone in vain. Still you have not revealed yourself to me!' Girish depicted this episode of the Master's life and his intense longing in the character of Vilwamangal. In the play, Vilwamangal cried out:

There! The conches and bells are sounding;
 The brahmins are performing their evening
 worship.
 I see the day is already over.
 Oh! Another day is gone. Still I have not seen
 Him! ...
 Reveal yourself to me! O Compassionate Lord,
 reveal yourself to me!
 My heart is riven by despair (4.293–4).

Rupa-Sanatan

Girish witnessed Ramakrishna's love for God and unique renunciation, and he depicted this in *Rupa-Sanatan*. The play was first staged on 21 May 1887 at the Star Theatre. It is a five-act play. Like *Vilwa-*

mangal, Girish based *Rupa-Sanatan* on a story from the *Bhaktamala*. In the character of Sanatan, Girish depicted Ramakrishna's love and longing for God, his austerities, renunciation, truthfulness, and steadfastness for the ideal. But this play also revealed the condition of Girish's mind just after Ramakrishna passed away.

Abinash Gangopadhyay, Girish's biographer and secretary, wrote:

In *Rupa-Sanatan*, Girish showed Chaitanya taking the dust of his devotees' feet at Chandrashekhar's house in Varanasi:

A Vaishnava: 'Lord, what are you doing?'
 Chaitanya: 'I am plunged in grief because of separation from Krishna, so I am putting the dust of his devotees' feet on my body. Thus I shall get the devotees' grace.'

When this play was staged at the Star Theatre, some Vaishnava leaders were upset. According to them it is unthinkable that Chaitanya would take the dust of his devotees' feet and smear it on his body. They expressed their anger and even used abusive words against Girish.

Unperturbed, Girish firmly replied: 'I have seen with my own eyes that Ramakrishna took the dust of his devotees' feet.' He continued:

I don't write anything without knowing the subject myself. One day at a devotee's house, after kirtan and spiritual talk, Sri Ramakrishna took the dust of that place and smeared it on his own body. When the devotees tried to prevent him, the Master said: 'You see, this place has been sanctified by the presence of many devotees, spiritual talk, and singing the glory of God. Where God's name is sung, God himself comes to listen to it. The dust of this place has truly been purified by the touch of the devotees' feet.'¹⁴

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The main characters:

Chaitanya
 Sanatan, prime minister of the nawab of Bengal
 Rupa, one of Sanatan's brothers and also a
 minister
 Vallabha, one of Sanatan's brothers
 Ishan, Sanatan's servant

Buddhimanta, a landlord
Jivan, a brahmana
Hussein Shah, the nawab of Bengal
Ramdin, a jailer
Nasir Khan, a guard
Alaka, Sanatan's wife
Karuna, Rupa's wife
Vishakha, Vallabha's wife

Act One • Sanatan sits on the bank of the Ganges earnestly praying for renunciation. He feels that Chaitanya, whom he has recently met, is calling him. In the meantime, his servant Ishan arrives and asks him to return home to eat. He also reminds Sanatan that the nawab has sent messengers to him ten times. Sanatan laments that he is still working as a minister of this Muslim ruler, whereas two of his brothers, Rupa and Vallabha, have left and become disciples of Chaitanya. He decides to resign from his post.

Buddhimanta and Jivan are very jealous of Sanatan and his family's wealth, so they try to damage Karuna's and Vishakha's reputations by spreading rumours that their husbands have become mendicants. This has no effect on the women, however, because they remain as devoted to Chaitanya as are their husbands, and they worship him in their family shrine.

Vallabha comes to see his elder brother, Sanatan, bringing news of Chaitanya and informing him that the Master will call him at the proper time. He also conveys Rupa's request that his fortune be distributed among the poor. Sanatan follows his brother's wish.

Act Two • Jivan delivers a cryptic letter to Ishan for Sanatan. The letter contains only eight syllables—ya, ri; ra, la; I, ram; na, ya—the first and last syllables of each line of this Sanskrit verse:

Yadupateh kva gata mathurapuri
Raghupateh kva gatottarakosala.
Iti vichintya kuru svamanah sthiram
Na sadidam jagat ityavadharaya.

When deciphered, the letter reveals this meaning:

Where now is that Mathura city,
where Krishna lived?
Where now is Ayodhya, where Rama ruled?
Thinking of this deeply, make your mind firm;
Know for certain: This world is not real.

This hint is enough for Sanatan to understand what his brother Rupa wishes to convey. Sanatan decides to go to Varanasi, where Chaitanya is staying. He asks Ishan to look after his wife, Alaka, and to distribute his wealth to the poor, setting aside a small amount for Alaka and Ishan himself. But before Sanatan can leave, two messengers from Hussein Shah arrive and forcibly take him to the nawab. Sanatan tells Ishan to give the news to Alaka, but the faithful servant follows his master instead.

Buddhimanta has been spying on Sanatan and tells the nawab that Sanatan is pretending to be ill. But the judge informs the nawab that Buddhimanta cannot be trusted, as he is doing all types of mischief because Sanatan works for a Muslim ruler. The angry nawab puts some defiled water into Buddhimanta's mouth, thus forcefully converting him to Islam. When the news of his conversion becomes public, he leaves his family and decides to go to Varanasi. Buddhimanta had spread rumours against Vishakha and Karuna, yet now they come to him dressed as nuns. They advise him to chant Chaitanya's name and thereby become free from sin. Karuna tells him: 'Touching a philosopher's stone, a piece of iron becomes gold; so also, seeing Chaitanya, a man becomes God.' Buddhimanta then begins to chant Chaitanya's name.

When Sanatan is brought before the nawab, the ruler asks him to concentrate on his work instead of trying to become a mendicant like his brothers. Sanatan refuses to work and says he wants to resign. He tells the nawab that his mind is focussed on God and so it is not possible to turn it to worldly duties. In response to the nawab's threats, he says that if he is forced to work, he will kill himself. The nawab orders his guard to put Sanatan in prison, and tells his doctor to treat him if he has any illness.

Alaka dresses like a young brahmin pandit, and Ishan takes her to Ramdin, the Hindu jailer. Ishan

introduces Alaka, saying that this pandit might change Sanatan's mind. Ramdin allows her to go to Sanatan and tells her to defeat Sanatan in debate by quoting the scriptures that say family life is better than monastic life. Alaka goes alone to Sanatan's cell. Sanatan does not recognize her. The two have a lengthy discussion, but Sanatan is determined to renounce family life. Finally, Alaka reveals who she is. Sanatan then tells her to return home and surrender herself to Chaitanya. Alaka leaves, in tears.

The nawab comes to the prison and asks Sanatan to look after his kingdom, because he is going to war with the king of Orissa. Sanatan declines, saying that his mind is on God now and he cannot turn it back to the world. The angry nawab orders the guard to put Sanatan in a dungeon and put his feet in chains. He is also to be given only fried gram and a little water.

Act Three • Alaka, Karuna, and Vishakha meet and plan to rescue Sanatan. Then Ishan arrives but has no news of Sanatan.

Alaka: 'Ishan, come with me. If I am a chaste woman and have true love for Chaitanya, I shall rescue my husband.'

Alaka again disguises herself as a brahmin pandit and goes with Ishan to Ramdin's office in the jail.

Ramdin: 'Hello, pandit. Why do you want to see me? Your luck is bad. But if you could change the mind of the minister, the nawab will give you a lot of property.'

Alaka: 'I am not only a pandit, but an astrologer also. I see your luck will change tonight.'

Ramdin: 'What do you mean? I am a low-paid jailer.'

Alaka: 'I promise that you will be a millionaire tonight.'

Ramdin: 'I promise that if I get a million rupees tonight, I shall give you whatever you want.'

Alaka: 'You have promised! Now take this jewellery. It is worth more than a million rupees.'

Ramdin: 'Where did you get this jewellery? Who are you?'

Alaka: 'I am the wife of Sanatan. Please keep your promise and release my husband, or I shall kill

myself with this knife.'

Ramdin is in a dilemma. He tells Alaka that there is a Muslim named Nasir Khan who is guarding Sanatan. However, he will try his best to release Sanatan.

Meanwhile, Nasir enters Sanatan's dungeon and asks him: 'Sir, you were a minister, and now you are in this dungeon. I hear you talking with someone. I see you are even happier than our nawab. Can you tell me why you are in this condition?'

Sanatan: 'Look, I am a servant of Chaitanya. How can I serve the nawab? My Lord is always with me.'

Nasir: 'Sir, I don't see anyone here. Who is this Chaitanya?'

Sanatan: 'He is a monk. He saves souls from bondage and distributes God's name to all.'

Nasir: 'Sir, I am a sinner and a Muslim. You are very respectable and also a holy man. I put those chains on your feet. Is there any hope for me?'

Sanatan: 'Nasir, you are a devotee. Chant Chaitanya's name and embrace me. He who chants his name becomes holy; it does not matter whether he is a Muslim or a Hindu.'

Just then Ramdin and Alaka enter the dungeon. Nasir salutes his superior, Ramdin, and says that he will not work anymore but instead will chant Chaitanya's name. He then leaves. Ramdin is surprised and feels the grace of Chaitanya. He realizes that God makes everything favourable for his devotees. He tells Sanatan: 'I have come here to release you. Please write on this paper that you will continue your service. Then please leave.'

Sanatan: 'How can I write a lie?'

Ramdin: 'I shall lie for you. The nawab ordered me to free you as soon as you agree to continue serving him. There is a horse for you. Please leave; otherwise you will die here.'

Sanatan: 'The nawab will punish you. Moreover, it is better to die than to lie or deceive others.'

Alaka: 'O devotee of God, why are you discriminating between truth and untruth now? The Lord Chaitanya is calling you. Please leave this place right now.'

Sanatan: 'Don't delude me anymore, my dear. Once you deluded me and I became involved in worldly life. Please leave me alone.'

Alaka asks Ramdin to release Sanatan and escort him out of the dungeon. She will do the rest. Ramdin calls for Nasir, but Ishan enters instead. Surprised, Ramdin asks Ishan how he got in.

Ishan replies: 'I saw a Muslim leaving through the gate, chanting Chaitanya's name. He told me that he was going to see Chaitanya. I asked him for his uniform, and he told me where my master was being held.'

Ramdin then unchains Sanatan and takes him outside.

Ishan tells Sanatan: 'Lord Chaitanya has called you. Let us go to him quickly.'

A boat is waiting for Sanatan and they leave for Varanasi, crossing the Ganges. Alaka becomes a nun like her sisters-in-law and dedicates her life to spreading Chaitanya's name among the masses.¹⁵

Act Four • Sanatan and Ishan are travelling through a forest when Sanatan tells his servant: 'Ishan, I am having difficulty walking. It is as if someone is pulling me back. I am going to see Lord Chaitanya. Why do I have such difficulty? Ishan, when you come near me, I can't breathe. I am afraid to look at your quilt; I think it is not pure.'

Ishan: 'Master, it is made with holy cloth marked with the Lord's name.'

Meanwhile a man comes across Sanatan and Ishan and invites them to his house to eat and rest. He tells them that this place is infested with robbers. Sanatan notices that Ishan is afraid, and asks him: 'Do you have any money with you? Be honest.' Ishan replies that he stitched fifteen gold coins into his quilt for the expenses of their journey. Sanatan then realizes why he has been having difficulty walking and breathing. The man accompanying them reveals himself to be a robber, and threatens to attack Ishan. Sanatan stops him and says: 'Please wait. Take all of my servant's gold coins, but I beg one from you for him so that he can return home.' The robber is touched and he honours Sanatan's request.

He says: 'I have been watching you for the last

three days. I knew that your servant had money, so I planned to kill you both and take the money. Now that I know you are a real holy man, your life is safe.'

Sanatan asks Ishan to return home, keep all the money he gave to him earlier, enjoy his family, and take refuge in Chaitanya. Ishan reluctantly leaves, blaming those fifteen gold coins for his misfortune. Sanatan continues walking to Varanasi.

Meanwhile, in Varanasi Chaitanya is staying at Chandrashekhar's house. Rupa and Vallabha arrive and Chaitanya takes the dust of their feet, embarrassing them. Chaitanya explains his action: 'Rupa, don't you know that even the gods worship the devotees of Krishna? Human life is precious. One among millions becomes a devotee of Krishna; you are one of them. You two brothers have come. Now where is my Sanatan?'

Rupa: 'I have heard that the nawab became angry and put Sanatan in jail.'

Chaitanya: 'I am convinced that no power in this world can bind Sanatan. He will come here soon.'

Rupa is a great Sanskrit scholar, so Chaitanya asks him to go to Vrindaban and write books on devotional sadhana. Vallabha accompanies him.

Chaitanya later explains why he took the dust of devotees' feet: 'When I become anxious because of my separation from Krishna, I take the dust of devotees' feet and put it on my body. If I receive the grace of devotees, then I will definitely receive the grace of Krishna.'

Sanatan arrives in Varanasi and meets Chaitanya at Chandrashekhar's house. Chaitanya is delighted by Sanatan's story of how he was released from prison. Sanatan wants to stay with his guru, but Chaitanya asks him to go to Vrindaban and take care of the Madanmohan Krishna temple.

Nasir, Ramdin, and Buddhimanta also come to Varanasi, where they meet Sanatan, who encourages them to see Chaitanya, the incarnation of love. Chaitanya arrives and accepts the three men as his devotees. He asks them to repeat the name of Krishna.

Act Five • Chaitanya is now in Puri; Sanatan

is still in Vrindaban and has begun his sadhana at the Madanmohan Krishna temple, where he received the deity's grace. Rupa has begun to write on Vaishnava philosophy and also to compose dramas based on Radha and Krishna.

Jivan has come to Vrindaban, where he encounters Sanatan. He tells him that he fasted for seven days and prayed to Lord Shiva for money. On the seventh night, a voice told him in a dream that his wish would be fulfilled in Vrindaban. Jivan does not recognize Sanatan, who is now a poor mendicant. Sanatan responds: 'My goodness! You have come to Vrindaban for money? At any rate, Lord Shiva's words cannot be false. Look, there is a philosopher's stone in the bushes near my cottage. Any metal you touch with it will turn into gold.' Jivan picks up the stone and touches his key with it: The key turns into gold. Excited, Jivan asks: 'Sir, are you Lord Shiva, playing with me?'

When Sanatan tells him who he is, the latter exclaims: 'You must be a god. You must have something more precious than the position of prime minister for the nawab and this philosopher's stone. Please give me that precious thing.' He then throws the philosopher's stone into the river nearby. Sanatan tells him: 'I am a poor mendicant. I have only Krishna. Please repeat the Lord's name, "Krishna,

Krishna, Krishna".' Jivan repeats the Lord's name and his life is changed.

Madanmohan Krishna has been the family deity of the Chaube family. Chaube's wife and son take care of the deity. But in a vision, Madanmohan tells Chaube's wife that he will like to live with Sanatan. So she gives the deity to him. Finally Sanatan has the vision of Madanmohan and Radha.

(To be continued)

References and Notes

10. *Bhakta Bhairav Girishchandra*, 58–9.
11. *Sri Ramakrishna O Banga Rangamancha*, 111.
12. *Girish Rachanavali*, 4.274.
13. 'Chintamani' means 'the jewel of thought'. Vilwamangal's Chintamani was a courtesan, but Pagalini's Chintamani was Krishna.
14. *Girishchandra*, 217–18.
15. Girish here differs from *Bhaktamala* and *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. According to *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Sanatan buys his freedom from the Muslim jailer by giving him 5,000 rupees. He tells the jailer to inform the nawab that he had been taken to the Ganges to bathe, and he jumped into it and was drowned. The Muslim jailer took the money, released Sanatan, and helped him to cross the Ganges along with his servant Ishan. Girish's conscience did not approve of this deceit from a devout Vaishnava like Sanatan, so he created the characters of Ramdin, Alaka, and Nasir and released Sanatan from the dungeon in a more dignified way.

Alexander Gnatyuk-Danilchuk: A Bridge Builder

Alexander Gnatyuk-Danilchuk, who passed away at his apartment in Moscow on 7 July after a prolonged illness, was a true lover of India and Bangladesh. As the board member of the Russian Association of International Relations and the president of the Russian Society of Friendship and Cooperation with Bangladesh, he actively worked for fostering Indo-Russian and Russo-Bangladeshi ties. Born on 21 June 1923, Gnatyuk-Danilchuk obtained his candidature in philology from the Moscow State University. A linguist of repute, he worked as the professor of foreign languages at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. A disciple of Swami Bhuteshananda of the Ramakrishna Order, he had close contacts with the Belur Math and the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata. He was well known for his contribution

in popularizing Rabindranath Tagore's literature in Russia, for which he was conferred a doctorate, *honoris causa*, by the Rabindra Bharati University. He was one of the ten members who established the Ramakrishna Society-Vedanta Centre in Moscow in 1995. Earlier, he had started the Russian magazine *Saraswati* which carried a translation of Swami Vivekananda's *Raja-Yoga* in Russian and an impressive study of 'Tolstoy and Vivekananda'. His many books in Russian included *Tagore*, *Bangla-Russian-Bangla Dictionary*, and *India and the Soviet Union—a Dream Fulfilled*. He will especially be remembered by the people of Bengal and Bangladesh for his ardent love for and devotion to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



**Sree Sai Samartha
Satcharita: The Life and
Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba**
Govind Raghunath Dabholkar-
Hemadpant; Trans. Zarine

Sree Sai Press, C-40 Okhla Industrial
Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020.
E-mail: sspdelhi@mantraonline.com.
2004. xiv + 802 pp. Rs 200.

Innumerable saints and sages have moulded and moved Indian life and society for thousands of years. These sages and saints have constituted the country's real treasure. This book is the story of a very popular nineteenth century saint from Maharashtra who has captured the imaginations and hearts of people everywhere by his simplicity, love, and solicitude for human welfare. It is not clear whether he was born a Hindu or a Muslim; and, of course, it is not important. What is important is that he lived and expressed the highest ideal of spirituality. This is evidenced by the large number of people who still revere him—many consider him an avatara—read about him, make pilgrimage to his shrine at Shirdi, and meditate on his life and teachings.

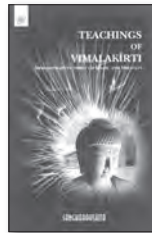
Dressed in a long white *kafni*, his head covered, to all outward appearances Sri Sai Baba was a fakir, and was known as one. He also slept in an abandoned masjid. But his religious behaviour and teachings spoke of a Hindu background. He was devoted to gods and goddesses and was an erudite scholar in various scriptures. Born sometime in 1838, he spent twelve years with his guru and came to the village of Shirdi in 1854 at age sixteen. Except for a year, he continued to live in Shirdi till his *mahasamadhi* in 1918.

Initially, the villagers did not understand the saint's behaviour, but sadhus and sadhakas who met him recognized Baba to be a realized soul, a 'rare gem'. Slowly this 'mad fakir's' greatness and charisma dawned on them. He spoke in simple language and taught in homely parables. The many miracles attributed to him made him very popular and even in his lifetime he was ritually worshipped. Yet amidst

all this he loved the village children and was like a mother to the villagers. Sai Baba permitted the author (1859–1929) to write this book only after much insistence. Originally, it was a composition in Marathi verse spanning fifty-three chapters. To the devotees this is a very sacred work, full of the nectar of knowledge. Each chapter is a mixture of philosophy, anecdotal narratives, and teachings of the saint. The many apparently miraculous works of Baba find an important place in the text.

A useful glossary, a chronological index of the events of Baba's life, and the notes at the end of each chapter are especially useful for scholars. But for the devotees of Baba, this is a wonderful companion for meditation on the *sadguru*.

Swami Satyamayananda
Probationers' Training Centre
Belur Math



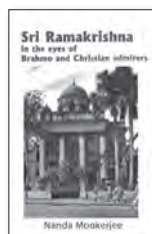
**Teachings of Vimalakirti:
Demonstration through
Magic and Miracles**
Sangharakshita

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina, Phase I,
New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: nab@vsnl.in.
2007. 160 pp. Rs 195.

The *Vimalakirti Nirdesha* or 'Teachings of Vimalakirti' is an unusual Mahayana Buddhist text. Vimalakirti is a follower of the Buddha, a householder and merchant. Yet he is one of the foremost of bodhisattvas, and is equipped with tremendous miraculous powers, which he uses to drive the teachings of the dharma deep into the hearts of his hearers, among whom number hundreds of thousands of arhats and bodhisattvas. Sangharakshita, born Dennis Lingwood, the well-known and learned—if somewhat controversial—founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the Western Buddhist Order in England, presents a discussion of and commentary to the *Vimalakirti Nirdesha* for the Buddhist practitioner and all serious spiritual aspirants. An example of his insightful commentary: 'We

often speak of higher spiritual experience—or even nirvāṇa—as if we knew all about it. But we don't. In fact, we don't really know anything about it at all. We cannot even conceive of it. ... Emancipation, spiritual emancipation, is always emancipation from the known; and the attainment of emancipation is always attainment of the unknown, the unpredictable, the unforeseen, even the unforeseeable. Every emancipation is therefore unconceivable' (13). From creating Buddha-realms to entering the 'Dharma-door of nonduality'—the Bodhisattva strives to fulfil the vow: 'However innumerable living beings are, I vow to deliver them.'

PB



**Sri Ramakrishna
in the Eyes of Brahmo
and Christian Admirers**

Ed. Nanda Mookerjee

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029.
E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2007. xxii + 141 pp.
Rs 50.

It is a matter of great joy that such a wonderful book on Sri Ramakrishna is being published after a lapse of thirty years—this being a reprint of a 1976 publication. It provides us an opportunity to have a glimpse of a great life in larger perspective. Sri Ramakrishna has imparted a tremendous dynamism and urgency to religious commitment and spiritual aspirations of the modern human being. His catholicity and God-centered life attracted the Brahmo admirers of Kolkata. They were closely associated with him and were instrumental, to a great extent, in bringing him into the limelight. His extraordinary life also drew the attention of Western scholars like Max Müller, Romain Rolland, and Arnold Toynbee. Their understanding of this great life and its precepts also form an important part of this book.

In his introductory essay, the editor has described lucidly the social milieu of the second half of nineteenth-century India in general and Bengal in particular. He has taken special note of the influence of the then prevalent socio-religious movements like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and Theosophy. He mentions the controversies and conflicts that existed between the different sects of Hinduism. Finally, he pinpoints how Sri Ramakrishna's exemplary life and unique approach to religion came as a refreshing and invigorating moral stimulus in a spiritually fragmented and truncated society.

The introduction is followed by an impressive collection of articles on Sri Ramakrishna by his Brahmo and Christian admirers. The list of contributors includes: Keshab Chandra Sen, P C Mazoomdar, Shivanath Shastri, Ashwini Kumar Datta, Trailokyanath Sanyal, C H Tawney, Max Müller, Lord Ronaldshay, Romain Rolland, Nicholas De Roerich, Hermann Keyserling, Albert Schweitzer, Arnold Toynbee, and Ernest Horowitz.

Each article is remarkable, providing specific insights into Sri Ramakrishna's personality: his spotless holiness, ineffable blessedness, profound wisdom, child-like simplicity, unworldly peace, and all-absorbing love for God. Interestingly, the articles seem to suggest that all the contributors had the same aim while penning their views—contemplating the unique life and message of Sri Ramakrishna and paying their homage to a person who is acclaimed as the 'prophet of renaissance India'. A few key dimensions of the different religious philosophies of India have also been discussed by some of the contributors. In several of the articles, Sri Ramakrishna comes alive in our mind's eye: travelling in a horse-carriage, laughing and joking, and then suddenly passing into samadhi—his whole countenance aglow with a strange spiritual light as he converses with Kali, the Mother.

The book has three appendices: 'The Brahmo Press on Sri Ramakrishna', 'Obituary Notices in the Brahmo and Christian Press', and 'Spiritual Experiences of Sri Ramakrishna (as told by him)'. A chronology of important events in Sri Ramakrishna's life, a bibliographical note, and photographs of some of the contributors are useful additions to the text.

This publication is a valuable historical document. It also allows us a gaze at the blazing sun that Sri Ramakrishna was.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

Professor, Plant Physiology

Junagadh Agricultural University, Junagadh

BOOK RECEIVED



Unseen Horizons

Vishal Prabhu

Sanbun, A-78 Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: sanbunpublishers@hotmail.com. 2007. 51 pp. Rs 50.

A book of poems on life—about the joys, inspiration, and realizations of life.

REPORTS

Celebration and Inauguration at Vivekananda University

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, celebrated the third anniversary of its foundation on 4 July 2008. A special convocation was



Swami Atmasthanandaji inaugurates the new headquarters of Vivekananda University

held on this occasion and Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, declared open the newly constructed central building of the university. Dr G Madhavan Nair, Chairman, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) inaugurated the Vivekdisha Village Resource Centre (VRC) project under ISRO-VRC scheme. Prof. S K Thorat, Chairman, University Grants Commission, New Delhi, was the guest-in-chief. Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Rama-



Swami Prabhanandaji conferring diplomas

krishna Mission, presided over the function and awarded diplomas to students who passed out of the Narendrapur and Ranchi Morabadi

Prof. Shankari Prasad Basu receives DLitt (honoris causa)



New headquarters of Vivekananda University at Belur



faculty centres. Prof. Shankari Prasad Basu was awarded DLitt (*honoris causa*) for his monumental research work on Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, and Subhash Chandra Bose.

New Centre in Orissa

On 25 July, Swami Prabhanandaji inaugurated a new branch centre of the Mission at Hatamuniguda in Rayagada district, Orissa, and also laid the foundation stone for one of the proposed hostel buildings for school boys there. The centre is established in a hundred-acre land received from the Government of Orissa and its address is: **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, PO Hatamuniguda, Tahasil Bissam-Cuttack, Dist. Rayagada, Orissa 765 020. Phone: +91 6863 212323.

Medical Camps

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati, conducted a medical camp during Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Dham from 22 to 25 June, in which 2,570 patients were treated. Besides, several needy pilgrims were given clothes and snacks.

On 29 June, **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry**, conducted a multi-speciality medical camp as part of their regular mobile dispensary activities for tribals at Sirigin-dalapadu, Rampachodavaram. Nearly 800 patients from fifty remote villages were treated by seventeen doctors specializing in different fields, and helped by seventy-five volunteers and twenty-eight employees. Various lab tests were also conducted, including X-rays and ECG. All the patients were provided food with the help of Sri I Ramprakash, MD, Godavari Plywood, Rampachodavaram.



Swami Atmasthanandaji at the Seva Pratishthan

Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, organized a function on 27 July to mark the concluding phase of its platinum jubilee celebrations. On the occasion, Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated a new Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) unit and gave a benedictory speech. Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Sri Pranab Mukherjee, Union Minister for External Affairs, also addressed the gathering. Swami Prabhanandaji presided over the meeting. About four hundred monks and two thousand devotees attended the function.



Drama performance at Madurai

Silver Jubilee Celebration

Ramakrishna Math, Madurai, held a function on 12 July in connection with the silver jubilee of its school. A life-size statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled, a commemorative volume released, and a short drama, 'Meenakshi Kalyanam', was staged by the students of the Vidyalyaya as the concluding event.

Achievements

Y Jaiprakash Singh, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, stood 1st in the '15th All India Essay Competition on Road Safety' conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in February. He was awarded a gold medal, a cash prize of Rs 5,000, and a certificate of honour. Another student of the Vidyapith, Nipoon Nandan Roy Choudhury, of class-II, stood 2nd in the '10th All India Essay Competition on Ve-

hicular Pollution', also conducted by CBSE in February. He was awarded a silver medal, a cash prize of Rs 3,000, and a certificate of honour.

Relief

Flood Relief· The following centres continued their relief operations among the flood victims in West Bengal. Details of relief materials distributed by them in July are as follows: **Belgharia**: 16,751 kg chira, 140 kg milk powder, 1,715 kg sugar, 5,574 packets of biscuits, 5,406 candles, 5,377 matchboxes, and 304,800 halogen tablets to 14,389 flood victims belonging to 6 villages of Sabang block in Paschim Medinipur district and 1 village of Patashpur block in Purba Medinipur district. Besides, the centre sprayed bleaching powder in two villages, provided medical care to the villagers, and repaired a village road, including 3 culverts, damaged by the flood. **Chandipur**: 5,659 kg chira, 260 kg milk powder, 1,331 kg sugar, gur, and sugar candy, 3,207 kg rice, 166 kg dal, 755 kg potatoes, 3,600 packets of biscuits, 12,000 halogen tablets, and 325 kg bleaching powder to 22,882 victims belonging to Bhagawanpur, Chandipur, and Patashpur areas in Purba Medinipur district and Sabang in Paschim Medinipur district. **Contai**: 26,556 kg chira, 5,255 kg sugar, 1,477 packets of biscuits, and 100,000 halogen tablets to 9,500 flood-affected families belonging to 33 villages of Egra and Contai sub-divisions in Purba Medinipur district. **Narendrapur**: chira and gur to 1,994 flood-affected families, and 120,786 plates of khichuri to flood victims at Patashpur I and II, Bhagawanpur I, Egra II, and Chandipur blocks in Purba Medinipur district and Debra block in Paschim Medinipur district. **Tamluk**: 12,637 kg chira and 1,264 kg sugar to 3,672 families belonging to 9 villages of Pingla block in Paschim Medinipur district. **Taki**: 1,400 kg chira, 167 kg gur, 240 packets of biscuits, 50 kg milk powder, and 15,000 halogen tablets to 688 flood victims at Hingalganj block in North 24 Parganas district. In Orissa, **Bhubaneswar** centre distributed 3,000 tarpaulins to flood-affected families belonging to 146 villages of Basta block in Balasore district.

Distress Relief· **Belgaum** centre distributed notebooks and pens to 250 needy school students of nearby areas. **Nagpur** centre supplied 530 school uniforms, 1,600 notebooks, 530 pens, and other stationery items to needy students of 13 schools in 12 nearby villages. **Ulsoor** centre gave school uniforms, notebooks, and other items to 7,233 poor students of 82 villages in 4 districts of Karnataka. Besides, the centre built 70 toilets in Anayanadoddi village of Anekal Taluk in Bangalore urban district as a part of its rural welfare programme. 